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12 PAGES OF BASS LESSONS FROM WORLD-CLASS TUTORS **INSIDE!**

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Bass Guitar

THE **UK'S NUMBER ONE** BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

NAMM 2019 SHOW REPORT

GUY PRATT

BEYOND PINK FLOYD AND BRYAN FERRY

The master revisits his unique career

THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY OF...

TAL WILKENFELD

PRINCE. CLAPTON. JAGGER. BECK.

What did she learn from the legends?

INTERVIEWS

DARRYL JENIFER, **BAD BRAINS**

NICK BEGGS, **MUTE GODS**

ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES

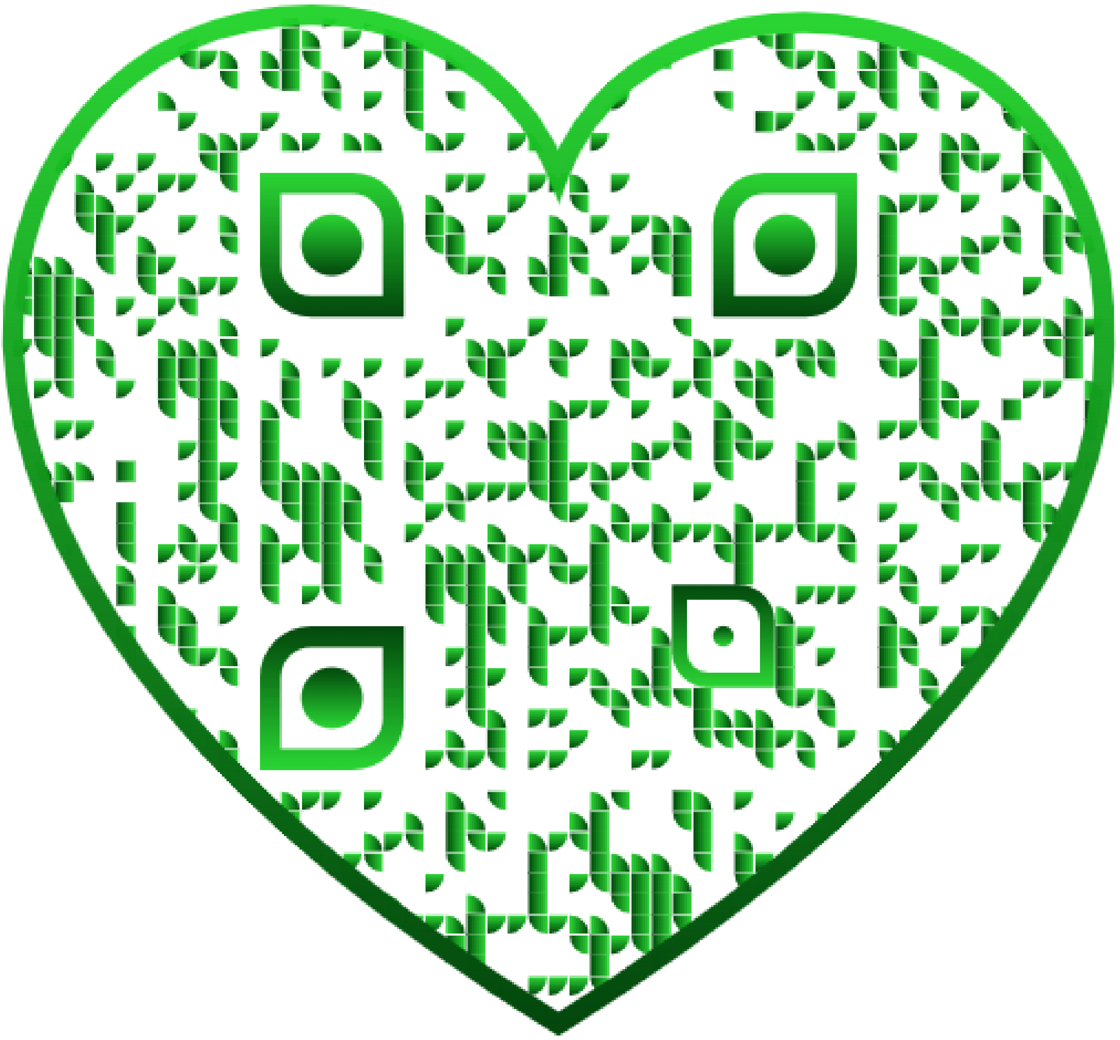
MUTE LIKE A VETERAN, TAP LIKE A DEMON

REVIEWED

ESSENTIAL NEW BASS GEAR

Sadowsky, Rickenbacker, Yamaha and more!

FUTURE



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As the editor of not one but two magazines devoted to the mighty bass guitar, I'm often asked if I think that the bass movement is progressing or stagnating. It's a relevant question, because we bass players have high regard for the pioneers of our sound. The answer is clear to me, though – we bassists are moving purposefully into the future, with eyes and minds wide open.

Look at this issue's cover star Tal Wilkenfeld as the perfect example of this progression. She's talented and driven, of course, but then so are hundreds of bass players. What defines Wilkenfeld is her understanding of what bass means. Do bass frequencies need to come from a bass guitar? Similarly, do bass guitars need to emit low frequencies? It's crucial to be aware that these questions can, and should, be asked in the modern era.

At the same time, we take pride in saluting the bass greats who made all this forward motion possible. Veterans of our world such as Guy Pratt, Nick Beggs and Jens Ritter are all over this issue. In our reviews, we salute the retro Danelectro 64 and Rickenbacker 4003 just as passionately as we road-test forward-thinking products from Yamaha, Sadowsky and Electro-Harmonix. In our world-class education section, our tutors – Stuart Hamm, Steve Lawson, Phil Mann and Stu Clayton – cover old-school techniques just as effectively as modern ones.

You see my point. Bass is going forward, we're going with it, and I'm so glad you're coming too. See you in April!

Joel McIver, Editor

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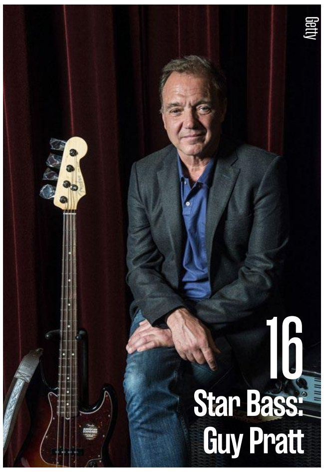

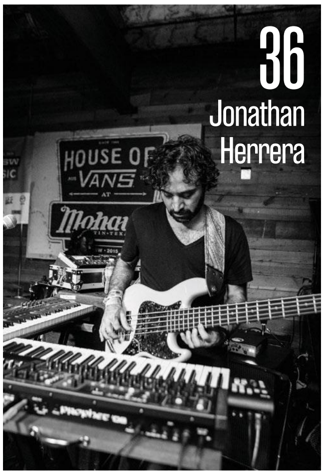

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THE LOWDOWN

News and views from the bass world, collated by *BGM*'s team of intrepid newshounds

SPLIT VOTE

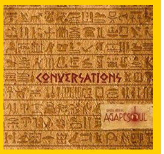
Gionata Quercetani is the inventor of the TravelBass, an electric upright bass project currently seeking funding on Kickstarter. As he tells us, "TravelBass is the first electric upright bass that can be disassembled and carried with you, even on a plane as carry-on baggage, thanks to its patented splittable fingerboard. It sounds exactly like a regular acoustic double bass, thanks to its powerful acoustic chamber, refined by hand by Italian luthiers." In the wake of our flightcase roundup last month, itself inspired by "robust" treatment of our bass gear by airline baggage handlers, this sounds highly interesting...

www.travelbass.it

RECOMMENDED ALBUMS

The bass-heavy listening that's rocking the office this month!

NEW-ISH ALBUM



AgapéSoul, Conversations (2018)

Our chum Darryl Anders pulls off the expert trick of balancing bandleader and bassist roles

OLD ALBUM

Duran Duran, Seven And The Ragged Tiger (1983)

Rio was the bigger album, but on the follow-up, John Taylor delivered the funk-pop like a master

REALLY OLD ALBUM

Miles Davis, In A Silent Way (1969)

The maestro, Dave Holland, demonstrating his phenomenal grasp of a groove

BROOKSY ON BASS

After months of playing, you may notice that your fingerboard loses its lustre. Although it can be lubricated and cleaned at any time, it's obviously easiest to do this when you change your strings. To prevent it happening too quickly, wash your hands before you play, especially if your hands are grubby from loading in at a gig. Bass manufacturers usually list a recommended cleaner on their websites, but different timbers react differently to various chemicals, so do google the necessary cleaner for your fingerboard. Pre-treated foil-wrapped wipes are very handy, but the liquid and cloth route is equally valid. Pay attention to the sides of the frets. **HOT TIP! Phenolic fingerboards on graphite necks can be cleaned with WD-40 for improved shine.**

ANGELIC

Reza Khota

South African bassist Carlo Mombelli, a veteran of sessions with Lee Konitz, Marcus Wyatt, Afrika Mkhize and Miriam Makeba among many others, returns with a new album, *Angels & Demons*. Featuring piano, guitar, drums, sax, cello and clarinet alongside bass, the album reflects the years of compositional creativity that have led Mombelli to teach at the Berklee College of Music, the Jazz Musik Akademie in Basel, Switzerland and elsewhere, and also as the author of the suitably cerebral *Intergalactic Bass Book*.

www.carlomombelli.co.za

LOW-END LEARNING

CHRISTOPHER BOLTE (SESSION BASSIST)

"I always try to find unique ways to provide any song I'm asked to play on with a fitting, but still interesting, piece of low end. As far as playing styles go, if a song calls for fingers, I play fingerstyle. If a pick is more up to speed, then that's what I use. I'd like to think that I see the bass more from a producer's perspective, so I always try to imagine what combination of playing technique, note choice, tone, and phrasing will best fit any given song."

BIG FISH

Bassist Norm Stockton has announced a single and series premier episode from his *Grooves & Sushi* CD/DVD and web series. Jazz, rock, world music and more all appear within the grooves, while a sushi chef cooks for the musicians. We're tuna-ing in now!

https://youtu.be/Fnr_UVY1ydw

BASSWATCH

Every month, keen bass-spotter Ray Walker brings us an online bargain

Marvit Apofi PJ-4C £1,595

https://tinyurl.com/y9qb7rnq

Ahoy, basswatchers! Check out this wonderful Marvit Apofi PJ-4C bass. This hand-made beauty boasts an alder body and neck with an eye-catching Canadian spalt maple top and a beautiful ebony fretboard. It sports lightweight Schaller bridge and tuners, said to be 40 percent lighter than their standard versions, which give this bass great balance. The addition of Aguilar P/J hum-cancelling pickups and circuitry provide outstanding tonal options. Luxurious!

BIMM INSTITUTE BIRMINGHAM

LOW LIFE

Tax The Heat bassist and BIMM tutor Antonio Angotti continues his advice column about live performance

Welcome back to the Low Life! This month, we're tackling the complex issue of live bass tone. Now, this is an incredibly subjective thing for many bass players, and one person's idea of a great bass tone is different to another's. But let me pose a question – have you ever been to a show to watch a band and struggled to pick out the detail in the bass part?

If this sounds familiar, then you'll want to make sure that you don't fall foul of this. You may be concerned that all of the hard work you've put into your lines could be lost on an audience if your tone doesn't cut it. This is something I overcame in the early days of Tax The Heat, thanks to the legendary producer Chris Goss.

Like a lot of bass players, my initial tendency was to boost the low end and cut the treble on my amp. At the time, my knowledge of mids EQ was limited, and so I left those frequencies alone. However, this combination led to a muddy, sub-orientated sound which meant that only the notes on the E string were discernible. Here are some handy tips that will help you regain tonal clarity in a live setting:

BALANCE YOUR STRINGS

Try to make each string roughly the same volume by experimenting with your EQ. No matter where you play on the fretboard, all of your notes should be clear without any dominance.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE MIDS

Boosting between 600 and 800Hz can bring out the harmonic multiples of the fundamental note, while a boost at 1.6kHz can give some nice punch to your overall sound. Mids are a good way of cutting through without turning up.

PUT FAITH IN THE PA

We tend to be DI'd a lot of the time through large PA speaker systems with their own subs. In this case, it's better to lay off the bass EQ as the PA will do a lot of the low-end filling for us.

BE EXTREME

When we experiment with EQ, we tend to make changes in small increments, which often doesn't change much. I've been encouraging our current crop of bassists at BIMM Birmingham to do whatever is necessary to achieve a desired tone, even if it means boosting or cutting a frequency as far as it will go.

RECORD AND EVALUATE

Video your live performances and make adjustments based on what you hear. The first time we played the Download Festival we were able to watch it back afterwards, which subsequently led me to change the settings on a few of my pedals. This process will give you a fairly accurate idea of whether your notes are projecting clearly.

Remember, be brave in your experimentation and learn from your experiences!

www.taxtheheat.com, www.bimm.co.uk

THE WOODSHED

Ace luthier Rob Elrick ruminates on the power of a stable neck and internal reinforcing rods

It's long been held that keeping a stiff upper lip is a sign of character – of stoic, unflappable cool. Stiff guitar necks have also been promoted as cool, particularly those with hidden assets, embedded deep within, buttressing against outside forces that conspire to pull them out of adjustment. But how do graphite and steel stiffening rods contribute to the stability and dependability of a wooden neck? And are they really necessary?

Guitar necks have been successfully fabricated without reinforcing rods for years. Plenty of acoustic guitar necks have been made with no reinforcement of any kind, not even a truss rod. The longer scale and higher tension of bass guitars make their necks poor candidates for such a cavalier practice, but it is possible to create a stable and dependable neck with nothing more than select materials and a conventional truss rod.

So how does one successfully fabricate a guitar neck without the use of supplemental reinforcements? First, it's important to understand a couple of things about the nature of wood. As a natural material, wood is hygroscopic, which means it reacts to changes in humidity. As the humidity in its surrounding environment changes, wood will either absorb moisture or release it through evaporation. Changes in temperature may also affect an instrument – often changing its tuning when it warms up or becomes cold – but humidity wields the most conspicuous influence over the movement of a wooden neck, movement that ultimately requires adjustment.

There are a number of measures that can ensure that a wooden neck will remain reasonably stable. The most common primary precaution is using superior-grade kiln-dried stock. Kiln drying reduces the moisture content in a piece of hardwood lumber to 6 to 8 percent. Since it is possible for "dry" wood to recapture moisture, it is a good practice to maintain a controlled environment of around 40 to 50 percent relative humidity for both workshop and lumber storage areas. However, there are no failsafe ways of protecting any piece of wood from the fluctuations in atmospheric conditions that a finished instrument will encounter during its lifetime of service. This means that it's also important to consider another unavoidable characteristic of wood – internal tension.

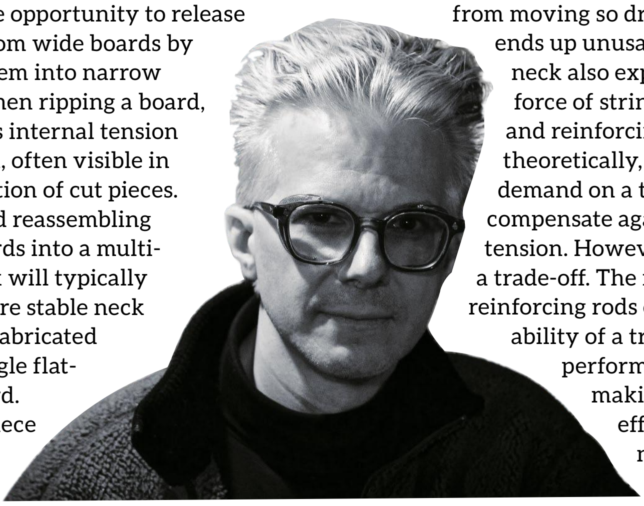
Every piece of wood possesses some internal tension. The force of this tension can be seen in boards that have twisted, bowed, or otherwise deformed. Sometimes these deformations can be predicted by looking at the undulating grain patterns in a particular piece of wood, but unseen internal tensions are always present in an unpredictable quantity. Because of this, many guitar builders turn to quarter-sawn lumber to ensure greater stability. Quarter-sawn lumber is more dimensionally stable, and offers a higher level of moisture resistance compared to flat-sawn wood. It is also more structurally stable and less likely to deform.

Multi-piece necks may also further ensure stability, even when all the pieces used are of the same species. Assembling a neck from multiple pieces of wood affords the opportunity to release tension from wide boards by ripping them into narrow pieces. When ripping a board, some of its internal tension is released, often visible in the deflection of cut pieces. Truing and reassembling those boards into a multi-piece neck will typically yield a more stable neck than one fabricated from a single flat-sawn board.

Every piece of wood wants to find its natural position at rest, which is why reinforcing rods came into use. It's no surprise that reinforcing rods have been marketed as insurance against the unpredictable movement of guitar necks. While this is certainly the reason that they're employed, their inclusion is not really for the end user's peace of mind. Fabricating a guitar neck is a subtractive process, and removing material to create its profile releases some of the internal tension present in every piece of wood. The release of this tension may cause a neck to move – sometimes dramatically – to find its new natural resting position. This can result in a forward or backward bow, a twist, or a hump – all undesirable results, particularly if you're fabricating a significant number of necks in a production environment.

> "GUITAR NECKS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY FABRICATED WITHOUT REINFORCING RODS FOR YEARS"

Internal reinforcing rods are a preventive measure employed to limit the ability of a piece of wood to find its new natural resting position. So does this make them a solution, or a problem? Well, that depends. If your business is fabricating and warrantying wooden guitar necks, it's a solution, since they may prevent a finished neck from moving so dramatically it ends up unusable. A guitar neck also experiences the force of string tension, and reinforcing rods may, theoretically, reduce the demand on a truss rod to compensate against that tension. However, there is a trade-off. The rigidity of reinforcing rods can limit the ability of a truss rod to perform its function, making it less effective. See you next time!



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BASS OF **TOMORROW**

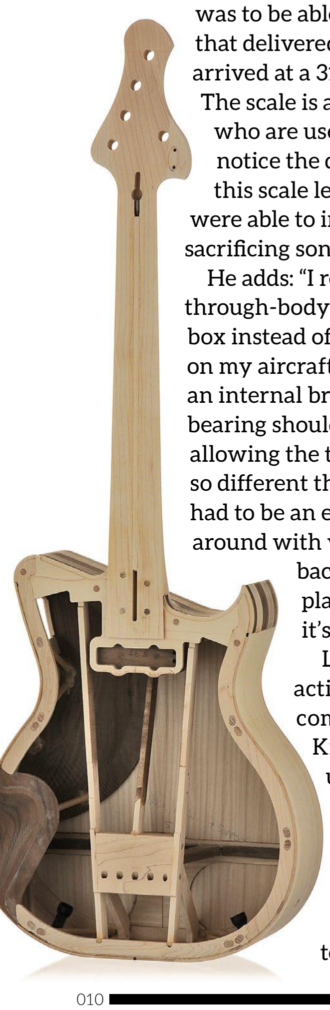
Throwing the rule book out of the window, Michael Gillett has taken it upon himself to reinvent the bass as we know it. After years of work, has the bass of the future finally arrived?

Words: Hywel Davies

"I've played a Fender Precision for years – I'm a big fan of Fender basses, because they're so good at what they do – but when you look at instruments like these, they're so unimaginative. I used to get frustrated by the lack of availability of designs that were more than essentially a plank and a neck."

That's what motivated former Royal Navy aircraft engineer Michael Gillett to move from working with helicopters to creating some of the market's most intelligently-constructed bass guitars. His initial goal was to make an ergonomically-friendly bass, which gradually evolved into the Gillett instruments we see today, as he explains:

"What I really wanted to do was to look at people of all shapes, sizes and ages, who are all ergonomically different, and say: 'How can I make an instrument that's comfortable for everybody to play?' That's really where I started. The first problem with bass is that you traditionally needed a long scale for the strings so you can actually get punch and tone, so the initial challenge for me was to be able to make a shorter-scale instrument that delivered that sort of performance. Gradually, I arrived at a 31.5" scale with through-body stringing. The scale is amazingly comfortable; even people who are used to playing 34" scale instruments don't notice the difference, believe it or not. By combining this scale length with through-body stringing, we were able to improve lower-fret accessibility without sacrificing sonic performance."



He adds: "I realised that to maximise the benefit of through-body stringing we needed to have a deeper box instead of a thin solid body. At that point, I drew on my aircraft-engineering experience and designed an internal bracing structure incorporating a load-bearing shoulder that would be stronger while allowing the top to move more freely. The result was so different that I was able to patent it. The box also had to be an ergonomic shape, so we started to mess around with wrist valleys and the deep recess at the back. The instrument could then fit into the player's body nicely – it's no accident that it's so comfortable."

Last but not least, a bespoke active electronic control system was commissioned to ensure that the Bare Knuckle mag pickup at the neck and twin under-bridge piezo transducers covered the full tonal spectrum without any problems from feedback.

While developing his beautiful 'basses of tomorrow', Gillett was also uniquely placed to get input from the 'players of tomorrow'. As a part-time teacher of BTEC

Popular Music at Richard Huish Sixth-Form College in Somerset, not far from the Gillett workshops, he regularly invited his students to try out prototypes and offer their opinions and suggestions. As he explains, "Being a teacher, it's great having this focus group of ever-changing students. They're my customers of tomorrow."

After a decade of experimentation, Gillett proudly presented his Contour electro-acoustics at the London Bass Guitar Show back in 2016. The range then consisted of two body styles – 'Standard' and a slimmer 'S'-type – available with fretted or fretless necks. Five-strings were only an option on the Standard, but the company is about to make its first batch of S-type fivers. A six-string guitar variant incorporating the same features as the basses has also just been added to the Contour family. A Rocklite version of the guitar is creating a lot of interest, accounting for around half the sales to date. Gillett is the first company to build a complete guitar body from this processed wood, which could well be the material of tomorrow, and may soon find its way into the Contour bass range.

www.gillettguitars.co.uk

NO TREBLE

Kevin Johnson shoots us the low-down

Only a month into 2019, and there are already big changes in the world of bass. The top story on No Treble was that funk icon Bootsy Collins announced he would be retiring from playing the bass in live settings.

'Time has come for me to tell all our Funkateers that I will not be playing bass in concerts anymore,' he wrote on his Facebook page. 'I have decided to become a coach for up and coming musicians. I know you're disappointed – just think for a moment how I feel. Doc said [it's] too much pressure on my inner ear and right hand.'

Collins, known for his bubbly bass-lines and over-the-top persona, has had a playing career stretching back 50 years. With the J.B.s (originally The Pacemakers) he and his brother Catfish Collins played on James Brown hits like 'Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine,' 'Super Bad' and 'Talkin' Loud And Sayin' Nothing'. He went on to play with George Clinton in Parliament and Funkadelic, and his own outfit, Bootsy's Rubber Band. Collins has promised to continue funking from the studio.

In gear news, Spector Bass Company was acquired by Korg USA. Luthier Stuart Spector, who started building basses in 1976, said that transitioning his company into its next phase of life was an 'emotional and simple decision all at once'. Korg has been managing Spector's import bass distribution since 2015, and has stated plans to drive growth and expansion as the brand owner. Stay tuned for details of new models already debuted at NAMM.

Bassist Tim Lefebvre is leaving the Tedeschi Trucks Band, where during his five-year tenure he's brought a truckload of soul and musicality to the table. The band's online statement explained that he's leaving to spend time working on more diverse projects. That makes sense for a player of his calibre and musical tastes. Besides his playing on David Bowie's final album, *Blackstar*, Lefebvre has laid down the low end for Wayne Krantz, Matisyahu, Elvis Costello, Knower and more. We're looking forward to what he cooks up next. Until next time, keep grooving!

www.notreble.com

BASSCHAT

Silvia Bluejay rates bass gear in order of importance

In the last few months we've been in a geeky mood on the Basschat forum. One intriguing thread, a slow burner rather than a hot one, invited us to list our bass gear in order of its importance. Knowing our community, I expected each poster's list to be different – but in the event, there's been a surprising amount of agreement, with only occasional clashes.

We all put our bass at the top of the list. Slightly less predictably, most of us consider the neck to be of utmost importance. The look of a bass is the biggest deal in practice; we usually won't pick one up if we don't find it beautiful. But after that if its neck is not to our liking the bass goes immediately back on its stand without getting plugged in. Next comes sound. The wood, the strings, the bridge, the type and position of the pickups, the active or passive electronics, and the EQ on the amp head all influence what we hear. However, individually, none of these seem to be demonstrably more important than the others.

There is less unity when it comes to arguably less important gear. Some say that once they're happy with their bass and amp they're not fussed about their cab. Time to relegate cabs to the unimportant category? 'No!' cry others, in complete disagreement (we wouldn't want it any other way). Similarly, high-mass bridges either radically change our basses' sounds or make no difference at all, depending on who you ask. And while some posters swear that they can tell the difference between one tonewood and another – even when used just in the fingerboard – others question the existence of tonewoods altogether.

One idea we all agree on is that the parts of our rig that make us feel comfortable are the most important. Depending on our personalities, needs, and probably also age, that may mean looking cool, producing exactly the sound we like, or being kind to our hands or backs... in other words, allowing us to enjoy playing rather than having to endure it. What's your own list of priorities? Let us know in General Discussion.

www.basschat.co.uk

TALKBASS

Don't fire the drummer, advises S. Marshall Perry

Many threads in our Band Management forum are not about how to manage a band, but rather how to manage relationships within a band. A common joke is 'Fire the drummer'. Most of the time, however, it's not that simple. We might be invested in a band; we might love its sound; we might have developed close friendships or professional contacts.

Band relationships are tough. Band membership means spending lots of time with a few people, magnifying small annoyances. Bands can include people of differing abilities, priorities, musical taste, dedication and communication styles. To perform is to 'put yourself out there' and it's easy to react defensively to critique. For bassists, over-loud guitarists and keyboard players with busy left hands can be vexing. There can be more serious problems too, situations where it might be easier to leave.

When problems develop it's worth asking yourself, 'Do I want to put energy and time into improving things?' The answer will depend on you; playing bass in a band can be a hobby, a livelihood or something in between. Some problems might stem from a misunderstanding. Others might require personal growth from your bandmates. Think all this through before giving notice or accepting an unhappy situation. I have no regrets about the times I decided 'This isn't worth it'. I've probably stayed in some situations a little too long.

If you decide to work on a situation, there's value in band meetings, where people put their instruments aside to talk about plans and goals, and assess recent gigs, practices and songs. This could take place in a practice space, at someone's home, or at a restaurant or bar. On TalkBass, I've read about 'intervention' band meetings, where the focus is one band member. Thankfully, I've never had to take part in one of those, and I've never had to fire a drummer, although I have been in a situation where I left the band... and took the drummer with me.

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THEORY OF THE MONTH

Modes of melodic minor? They're Nik Preston's middle name!

The topic of modes is one that causes a considerable amount of unnecessary confusion. This can be due to the way students are first introduced to them, as well as the degrees on which they occur in relation to their parent scale.

In order to simplify the concept, this month we're looking at all seven modes of the melodic minor scale, each beginning on the same root. This enables us to look at each mode in isolation, without being too concerned about its relationship to the parent scale – and as a result we can immediately focus on the modes' sound and the intervallic construction.

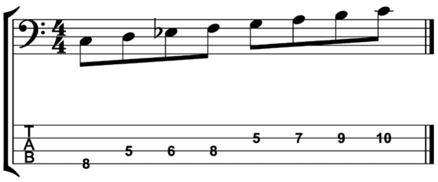
Each mode is written out over one octave, ascending, with a guide fingering, but as always we need to make sure that we explore all possible fingerings and practise descending forms as much as ascending. You can't have too many options!

Most of Western music's harmony is derived from the modes of the major scale, the melodic minor scale and the fifth mode/degree of the harmonic minor scale. Those of you who are acquainted with classical theory will be aware that there is a convention to teach an ascending and descending form of melodic minor. This has little to no use in contemporary music – and in any case, the descending form is just the 6th mode of the major scale, the Aeolian mode, which we already treat as a scale in its own right.

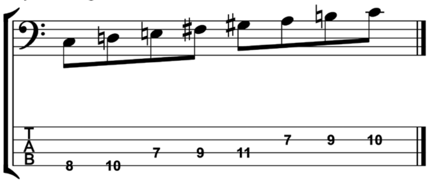
If you are familiar with this column you'll know that we often introduce scales and modes as organisations of notes from which we can derive melody and harmony. The melodic minor scale is no different. Each of these modes is known colloquially by a host of different names, but for clarity I have referred to them so that they best align to the type of chord from which they are derived or over which they are played.

There is no hard and fast rule for this, just a lot of conventions. This is the same as the way there are different names for various chords and even note lengths. You'll also notice that the chord type is written next to each mode name. To use any mode functionally, we always need to intuitively associate it with its own chord

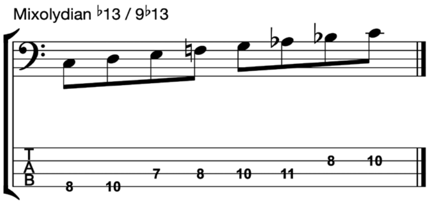
C Melodic Minor / Cm△7



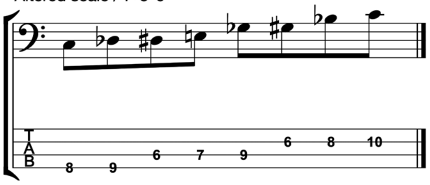
Lydian Augmented / △7♯5



Mixolydian ♭13 / 9♭13



Altered scale / 7♯5♯9

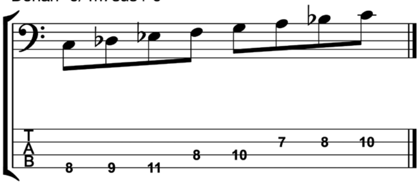


type, as that will nearly always end up being the context we use it in.

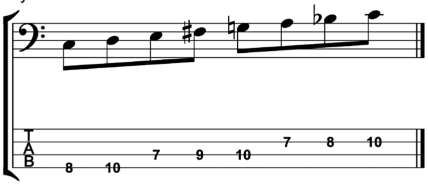
Sometimes you may hear the melodic minor scale referred to as 'jazz minor', probably by virtue of the fact that it has been used by most jazz improvisors at some point, but that is slightly misleading. Its harmony can be heard in an awful lot of pop and contemporary music. Stevie Wonder is a great example, and it also appears in a lot of rock and heavy metal, Dream Theater for instance.

There is one idiosyncrasy in melodic minor modes, which concerns the seventh mode of melodic minor – 'the altered scale'. This provides us with all of the altered tensions that can be used on a dom7 chord. In order to illustrate this, it is written out here in a way that goes against some of the conventions that are often observed when notating or spelling

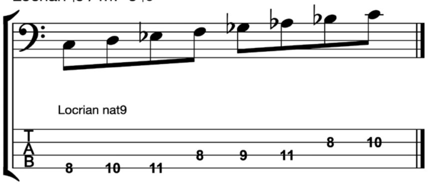
Dorian ♭9/ m7sus4♭9



Lydian dominant / 7♯11



Locrian♮9 / m7♭5♮9



seven-note scales – specifically, you'll see that it's not written with each different note on its own line of the stave.

Functionally, the altered scale contains both a flat 9, a sharp 9, a flat 5 and a sharp 5, so contemporary musicians will often refer to its construction this way. More classically oriented musicians may spell it out as 1, b2, b3, bb4, b5, b6, b7. This has the benefit of providing us with a min7b5 chord, and making sure each line of the stave is used, but the bb4 is the enharmonic equivalent of a major 3rd and will generally function as such. In contemporary music we are more likely to encounter it used over an altered dominant chord than a min7b5, but both are harmonically correct in the appropriate context.

So, not a lot of notation to negotiate this month, but a hugely important resource for all of us. Hopefully it's presented in a way that will let you familiarise yourself with these seven modes and their functions with way less anxiety than I experienced when I was first becoming acquainted with them. As always, take it slowly. Try to really get inside each mode and learn the chords that are derived from them. See you next month!

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TECHNIQUE OF THE MONTH

Ecki

The great Stuart Hamm continues his amazing column for all bassists, regardless of ability. Read on and take your playing a step forward!

Hello fellow bassists, ready for round three? Here's hoping that 2019 is already bringing you health, happiness, success... and a good drummer to groove with!

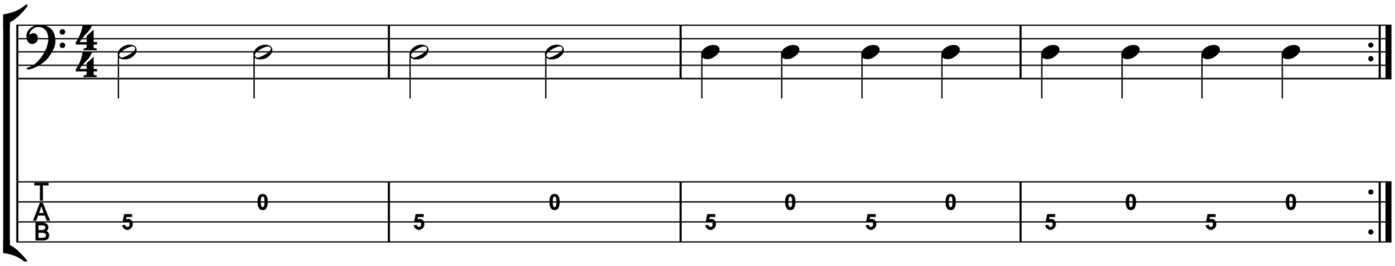
This month we will continue with different ways to use open notes in combination with fretted notes. Previously we worked on using the open note as a drone, and bending fretted notes to create different harmonies to be used in various keys in which the open note was a chord tone. This month, we will explore how to use fretted notes and open notes to create unique-sounding bass-lines.

> "THIS TECHNIQUE CREATES A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FEEL"

The whole point of this is to get a different sound out of the same note when it's played on an open string and then when you fret the same note. Used together, this technique creates a flanging sound with a completely different feel and vibe than you would achieve by simply playing the same line of 8th or 16th notes on a single string in one position. Let's get started!

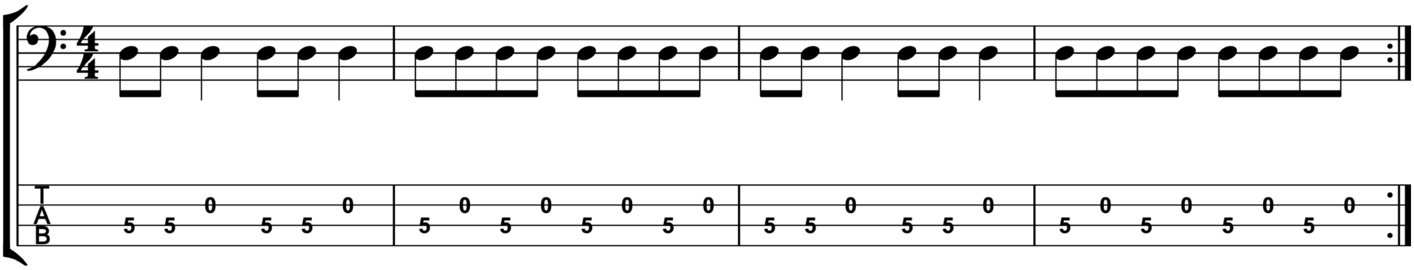
The first task is to get used to playing the same note, in this case the open D string and the D note fretted on the 5th fret of the A string, back to back. Exercise 1 is a simple exercise playing half notes and quarter notes, alternating between the fretted and open D notes.

Example 1



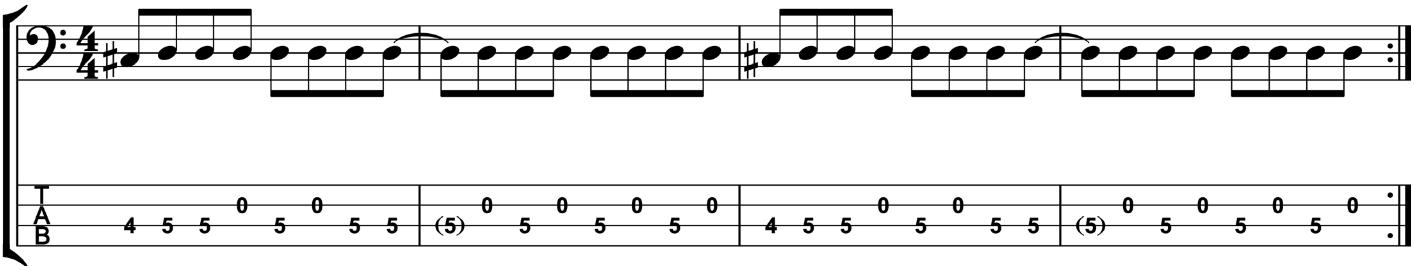
Now, as I stated in previous articles, you'll really have to work on keeping your fretting-hand fingers curved, and approaching the fretboard at a 90-degree angle so that the finger fretting the D doesn't touch the open D string, which would stop it from ringing. This will take some practice, which is why this first exercise is so deceptively simple. When you're comfortable with Example 1 (in other words, when it sounds good!) let's move on to Example 2, where we increase the difficulty level, quicken the pace, and add some more rhythmically interesting figures in bars 1 and 3, as well as alternating 1/8 notes in bars 2 and 4.

Example 2



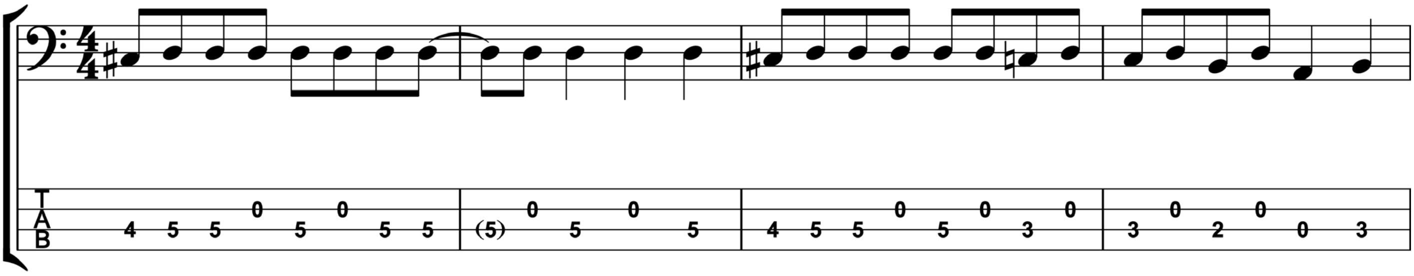
Sound good? Are you starting to get it? Please remember that there's no need to rush things. Practise at whatever tempo you are comfortable with, and increase the tempo as you make progress. When you're ready, let's kick it up another notch and add a hammer-on from fretted C# to D on the A string, and a tie between bars 1 and 2 and bars 3 and 4. Now we're starting to make some music with a groove. Practice and technique converted into a practical musical application… what a concept!

Example 3



Again, practise at a speed that is comfortable to you, and increase the speed as it starts to sound good, because where we're headed, the tempo is pretty fast! And what we are headed towards is the main groove of a song I wrote many moons ago called 'Call Of The Wild' from my second solo album, *Kings Of Sleep*. Here we also add a more active moving line on the fretted A string, alternating with the open D in fast 1/8 notes; the tempo on the recording is 130bpm.

Example 4

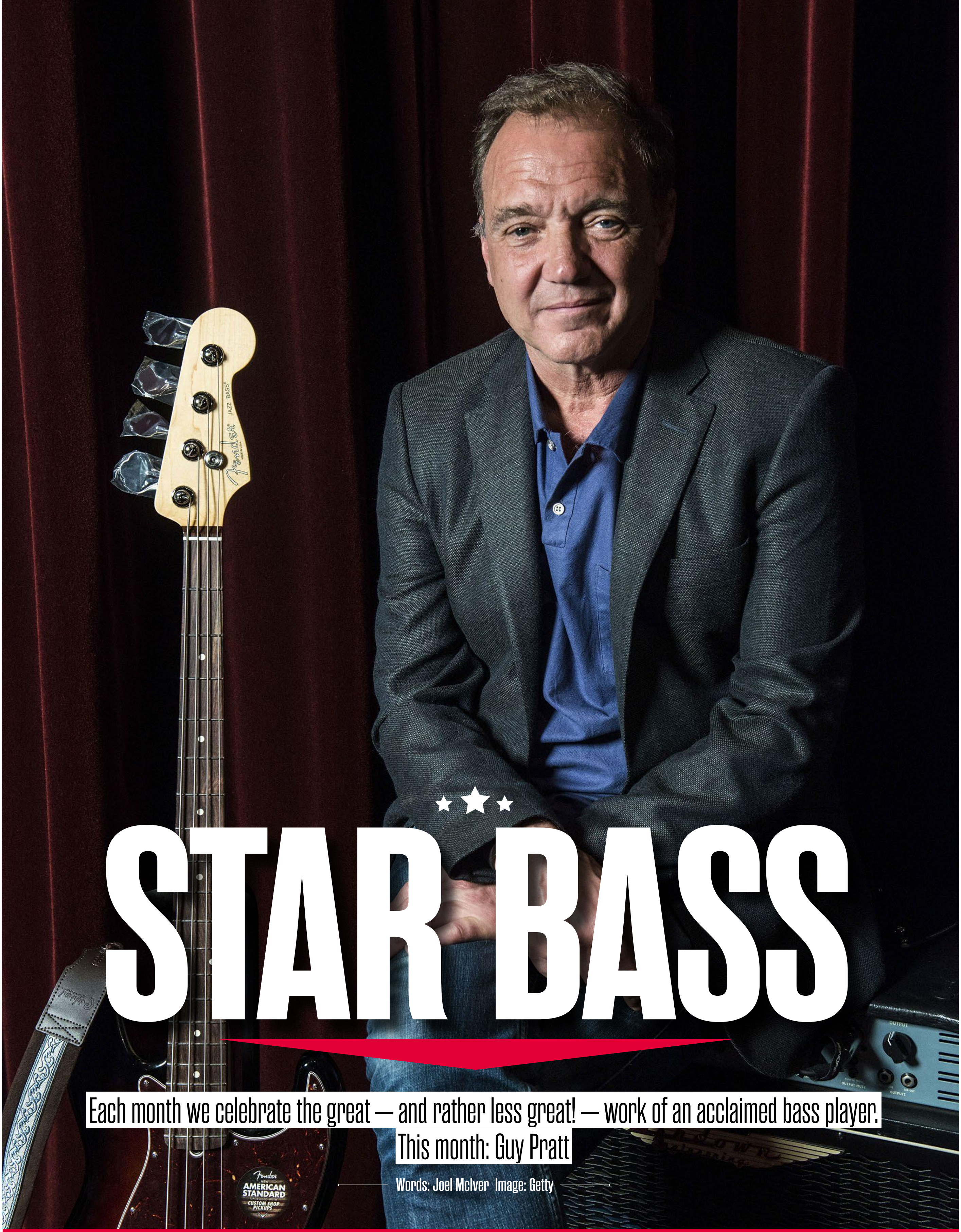


This song reminds me of the musical excesses of the late Eighties and early Nineties. If you think this bass-line is busy, you should hear the actual song. It has a double bass drum part, rhythm and lead guitars… and I doubled the bass-line!

I hope that combining fretted and open notes to create a unique-sounding groove will inspire you to turn it into unique musical lines. See you next month.

> "THIS SONG REMINDS ME OF THE EXCESSES OF THE LATE EIGHTIES!"

Watch out for the angle of your fretting-hand fingers; you'll need to arch them at around 90 degrees to ensure that the notes ring out

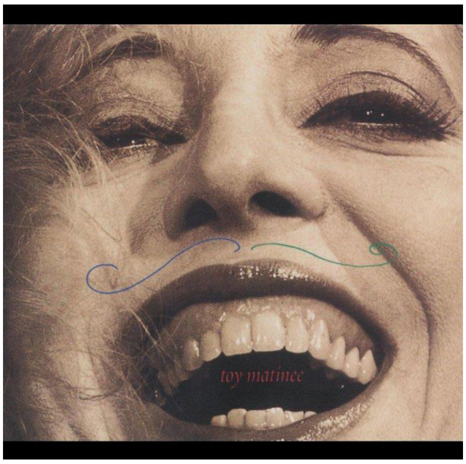


STAR BASS

Each month we celebrate the great — and rather less great! — work of an acclaimed bass player. This month: Guy Pratt

Words: Joel McIver Image: Getty

Icehouse, Bryan Ferry, Pink Floyd, David Gilmour, Madonna, Michael Jackson; a 2007 autobiography, *My Bass And Other Animals*; a renowned touring standup show; uncountable other feats of low-frequency mastery. All of these and many more add up to the career of the unique Guy Pratt, a veritable demigod in our world. He's currently in the limelight with Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets, led by the titular Pink Floyd drummer and also featuring Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet, guitarist Lee Harris and keyboard player Dom Beken. Accompanied by a brain-frying light show, the supergroup is embarking on a mammoth tour of Canada, the USA, Australia and the UK as you read this. The perfect moment, then, to grab Guy before he jumps on the plane and induce him to look back on five key albums (and one rather less key album) on which he appears…



MUST-HAVE ALBUM

Toy Matinee Toy Matinee (Reprise, 1990)

"This band were started by me and [Madonna producer] Pat Leonard. This album got no attention whatsoever, but it did launch the Tuesday Night Music Club, where Sheryl Crow came from. It came between the first and second Pink Floyd tours that I did, when I was living the dream in LA and basically out of my mind all the time. Everything was fantastic; I was 27 and driving a Mustang. I used Betsy [Pratt's famous 1963 Fender Jazz], my Steinberger, two Spector NS2s, my Status fretless and a Kramer stereo bass. The two standout songs for me are 'Last Plane Out' and 'Queen Of Misery', because the playing is fantastic. Because we were an actual band, we worked on the songs for months and we were able to finesse the parts. The one thing I've always hated about sessions is that you go in and you have to get it done as quick as you can. Then you walk out the door and realise 'Damn, I could have played it that way instead!'"

WORTHY CONTENDER

Madonna

Like A Prayer (1989)

"This is just a great album. The songwriting on it is extraordinary. On 'Oh Father', for instance, the tape only ran three times and the song was done. Madonna did a guide vocal which became the actual vocal she used, Chester Kamen came in and did a guitar overdub, we added strings and that was it. Amazing! 'Like A Prayer' itself has the best bass part of the five songs I'm on, in my opinion. I played it on a Spector, which was the bass I used for most of my octave-pedal stuff because it had so much top end. To this day, I really don't know how I got away with playing that bass part. It's my 'The Real Me', where I get to go nuts. On 'Till Death Us Do Part' I played the five-string stereo Kramer, which wasn't a particularly good bass but which had left and right pan controls for each string."

COOL GROOVES

Icehouse

Measure For Measure (1986)

"This is one of the great lost Eighties albums. It should have been huge; the songwriting is brilliant, and so is the production. The bass is nice and high in the mix. It's where I was poached by [engineer] Rhett Davies for Bryan Ferry's band; every time I went to the loo, he'd say 'You really should speak to Bryan – you'd be perfect for his band!' I'm very proud of this record, in particular a song called 'The Flame', which was written about the Sharpeville Massacre, and which was also the first time I used my Status fretless bass. The rest of it was done on a Steinberger – I was deep into Steinberger land back then. Unfortunately it later got stolen, and I know who stole it, although he subsequently denied it. The serial number is 712, if anyone comes across it and feels that they would like to return it to its rightful owner!"

WILD CARD

Jimmy Nail

Growing Up In Public (1992)

"Again, this is just a great record. There's some soul, there's some rock, and it has some of the best bass playing I've ever done. The funny thing is, considering that it's essentially an actor's pop record, it has an absolutely extraordinary list of guest guitarists on it. David Gilmour, Gary Moore, George Harrison, Elliott Randall, and also me – I played a lot of guitar as well as bass. I also co-wrote all of it, including 'Ain't No Doubt', whose melody I came up based on the American military line of 'I don't know but I've been told'. Jimmy is a brilliant songwriter, with a great ear for a melody, and he's a brilliant singer too – although he doesn't always make things easy for himself. He once turned down a support slot with Bryan Adams at Wembley Stadium, for example, because he thought that the rock audience wasn't right for his music."

AVOID AT ALL COSTS

Peter Cetera

One More Story (1988)

"I play on a song called 'You Never Listen To Me' on this solo album by Peter Cetera, who was Chicago's bass player. I've never heard the rest of this album, but my playing on this song is an object lesson in why you should never invite a band to play on your record when they're in the middle of a massive three-year tour. Patrick Leonard, who was producing the album, asked David Gilmour and me to come and do a session when Pink Floyd were coming through town, and so we did. David did this incredible, hugely over-the-top guitar solo and then I did my bass part. I'd been up for three days or something at this point, and I was in a bad mood because, along with the rest of the band, I had been invited to a very posh event, but couldn't go because I'd agreed to do this session. As a result I basically went crazy and played a ridiculously extravagant bass part!"

Harmony
Sadowsky

Transformation... Complete

Bassist supreme Tal Wilkenfeld returns with her long-awaited second solo album. We meet her for a frank discussion on the role of bass, the noble art of songwriting and growing as a musician

Interview: Chris Jisi

Tal Wilkenfeld's 2007 debut album was titled *Transformation*, and although it was an instrumental record made with a handful of New York City's top jazz musicians, the connotation seemed clear. After all, here was a bassist who moved from her native Bondi Beach, Australia to Los Angeles at 16 to pursue a career playing music, and within a handful of years she had become a YouTube-aided global sensation.

The flashpoint? A viral clip of her expressive solo on 'Cause We've Ended As Lovers', as a member of Jeff Beck's quartet at Eric Clapton's Crossroad Festival in 2007. Fast forward a dozen years, and the album title seems to have revealed its true meaning at last. For while Wilkenfeld has been nothing short of a marvel as a bassist for hire with everyone from Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, Toto and Prince to Mick Jagger, Ringo Starr, Jackson Browne, Keith Urban and Ryan Adams, she has returned to her very first incarnation: singer-songwriter. Transformation indeed.

Love Remains, Wilkenfeld's sophomore solo effort, is a stirring collection of 10 songs drawn largely from life experiences garnered during her time providing low end in the limelight. The framework is rock'n'roll, but this is no one-car garage creation. Along with guitarist Blake Mills, drummer Jeremy Stacey, keyboardists Benmont Tench and Zac Rae, and co-producer/guitarist Paul Stacey, Wilkenfeld unveils a soundscape wide and warm. Interlocked electric, acoustic and bass guitars conjure ambiguous harmonies and nuanced support parts that help her deliver her introspective lyrics in a voice that is sometimes delicate, sometimes dirty, but always direct from the heart.

Of her new path, she explains, "I was singing and writing songs from the first day I picked up a guitar at 14. When I moved to the States, my focus shifted to being strictly an instrumentalist. After a few years touring as a bassist, I realised I had abandoned my roots as a singer-songwriter, and that's when I started working on *Love Remains*."

With her new mission in place and her schedule cleared to be home in Los Angeles writing, Wilkenfeld found the perfect mentor in Jackson Browne. She recalls, "I met Jackson while performing with Jeff Beck at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame 25th Anniversary at Madison Square Garden. As I began recording my songs I would ask him for advice, and he was beyond helpful, taking the time to share his wisdom and knowledge. I feel very fortunate to have him as a friend." As a result, Jackson is credited as Executive Producer on *Love Remains*, having overseen the record's process.

Wilkenfeld cites Browne as more than just a major songwriting influence. "A lot of the artists who inspired me were ones I was introduced to during the making of the album, and that was thanks to Jackson and Benmont, who I'd met through Jackson. When they realised that I didn't grow up hearing artists like Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones or Neil Young, they made sure to educate me. That affected how the album developed, and they became some of my favourite songwriters, along with Elliott Smith and Paul Simon. All of these artists were influencing my writing in real time, along with artists whose inspiration I'd already drawn from, like Leonard Cohen and Jimi Hendrix."

She adds: "It was very helpful to have Paul Stacey working on this with me, because he's musically diverse and I trust his taste and experience. He offered a lot of great ideas, and even when we disagreed about certain things, he took a stance when he believed it was right for the music. It's important to work with a producer that isn't just a 'yes' person. Tony Berg [credited with additional production on 'Counterfeit'] was also very insightful and supportive throughout the making of the album. I don't think I've ever walked away from a conversation with him without learning something new."

> "I'M A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT BASS PLAYER THAN I WAS 10 YEARS AGO. WHEN I JOINED JEFF BECK'S BAND, I HADN'T EVEN PLAYED FOR FOUR YEARS!"

Still, any record needs a spark as a launching point, and for Wilkenfeld it was the album's first single, 'Corner Painter'. She explains: "I kept writing with the intention of finding a song that would become the linchpin for the rest of the album. When I wrote 'Corner Painter' and recorded it with the Stacey brothers and Blake Mills, I knew I had landed upon the sound – both compositionally and sonically – that I wanted the rest of the songs to stand alongside."

It was a culinary catalyst that brought the album's ensemble together. She chuckles, "I've met so many key people in my life through my love of sushi! I made plans to have sushi with Benmont. He invited Jeremy, who I'd met briefly at Eric Clapton's Crossroads festival, and halfway through the dinner, Paul showed up. After dinner, we went to my car and I played them some songs I was working on. They really connected with them, and I liked what they had to say about how they'd approach my music, so we made plans to try out a couple of songs in the studio. I suggested we call Blake Mills, who's one of the most inventive, musical guitarists I know, and the four of us cut 'Corner Painter'. A few months later, while having sushi with Benmont at the same place, I met Zac Rae, who joined us when we cut the rest of the album."

Meanwhile, the transition to singer-songwriter had an effect on Wilkenfeld's bass playing. "I'm a completely different bass player now than I was 10 years ago. When I was in Jeff Beck's band, I hadn't even been playing for four years!" she tells us. "It's a really exciting time when you pick up an instrument and start discovering your voice on it. Sometimes that can be a distraction from the discipline of when to step forward or when to step back. The more experience you get, the more your playing becomes less about your voice and more about the song. I'm backing up a singer, and that singer is me! Doing that regularly reinforced how to play the appropriate part for the song."

Tal's bass on *Love Remains* pivots between dual roles. There's the solid, song-minded support, as on the fiery 'Hard To Be Alone', the stadium rocker 'Killing Me' and the forlorn ballad 'Pieces Of Me'. In contrast, her bass engages in call and response with her vocal on the dreamy, reflective 'Counterfeit' and the strident 'Fistful Of Glass'. She reveals, "Most of the album, including 'Counterfeit', was recorded live, so aside from some written parts, the bass playing is a spontaneous reaction to my singing. For 'Fistful Of Glass' I overdubbed the bass and used a pick, but I retained a call and response approach."

"I'M BACKING UP A SINGER, WHO IS ME... I APPROACH IT LIKE I'M ACCOMPANYING MYSELF"

The album's crown jewel may well be 'Haunted Love', a bass and vocal ballad. Wilkenfeld took her Sadowsky NYC five-string, strung it E-A-D-G-C, added a capo at the third fret, and accompanied herself fingerstyle via chords and arpeggios comprising close voicings and open strings. Her fans got a preview of this unique approach when she performed Leonard Cohen's 'Chelsea Hotel' at *Bass Player* LIVE! 2013, where she was presented with *BP*'s Young Gun award. She reports, "'Haunted Love' came to me all at once – melody, chords and lyrics – and then I refined the various aspects. I approach it like I'm accompanying myself on a baritone nylon-string acoustic guitar. It's very satisfying to play because I get to sing on both of my instruments."

Elsewhere, Wilkenfeld played an early-60s Harmony H22 hollowbody bass on 'Under The Sun', which features her freely-phrased bass melody at the start and end. She says, "I wrote that song with Sonya Kitchell, and I grabbed a Harmony bass that was hanging on her wall. That bass defined the sound of the song, so I went out and bought one. Sometimes an instrument can inspire the creation or development of a song and in turn become a key part of its sound. It's nice to maintain that authenticity when recording it. That's why Jackson Browne has 15 guitars on stage!"

For the bulk of the album, Wilkenfeld turned to a Fender Precision belonging to Browne. She explains, "Early on we established a sound for the record; I don't want to call it vintage or retro, but it was definitely warm and analogue. We didn't want the album to sound like 1970 or 2019, we aimed to make it sound as if it could have been recorded at any time."

She continues: "Passive instruments like the P-Bass and the Harmony work well in that setting. Modern basses have more of a hi-fi sound, which works great in other situations, but it wasn't right for what we were trying to accomplish. On 'Haunted Love', to make my Sadowsky complement the sound of the rest of the album, I used flatwound strings, rolled the tone all the way down, and recorded it through a guitar amp."

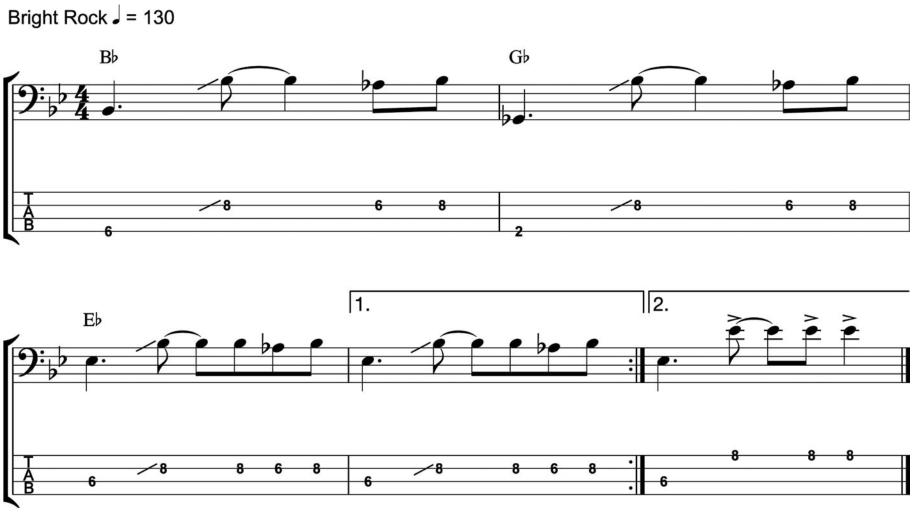
Fistful Of Bass

Love Remains has plenty of subterranean riches to mine. They run the range from deep-set analogue grooves and expression-heavy melodies to the album's vocal and bass showcase, 'Haunted Love', with its chordal riches and minute-long, key-shifting bridge.

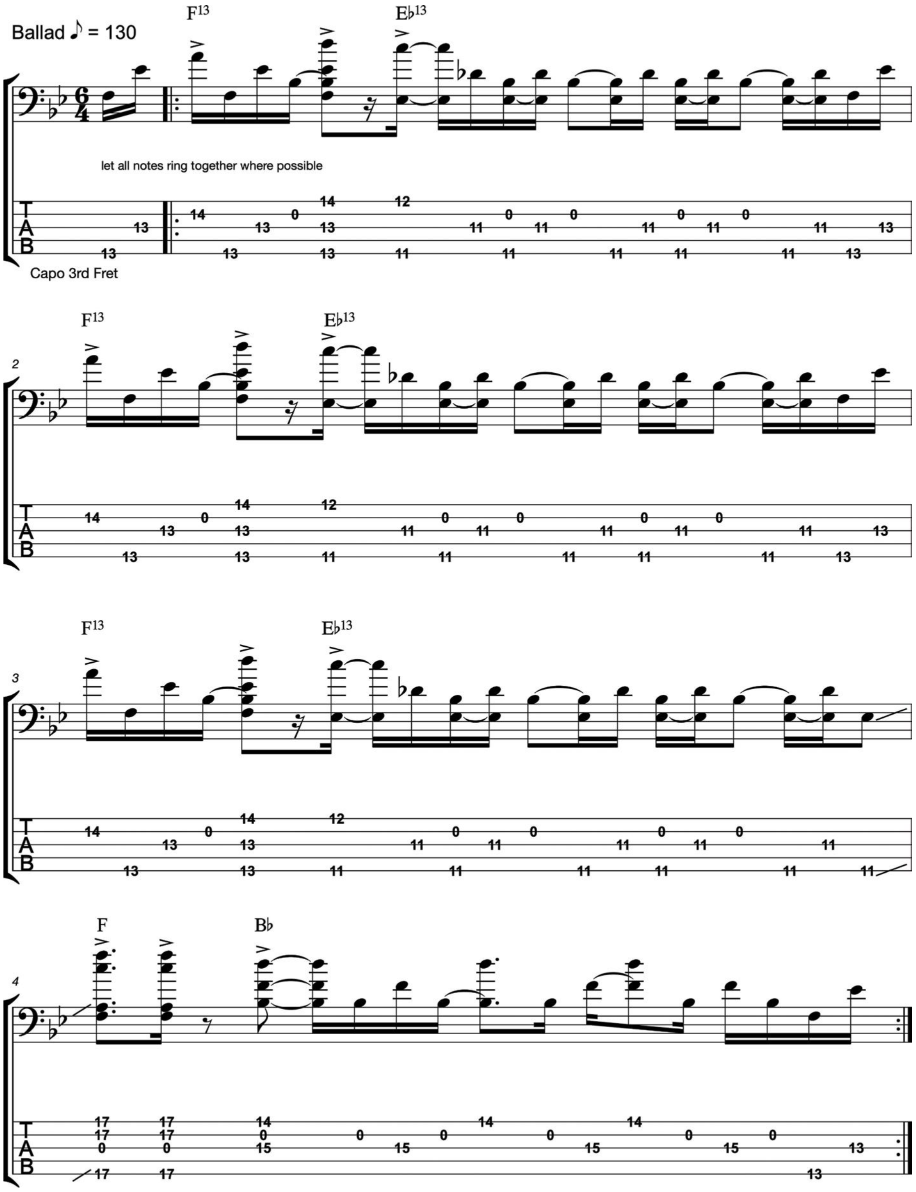
Example 1 contains the bassline from the outro section of 'Counterfeit' at 2:41. In typical Wilkenfeld fashion, she manages to nail the root notes while also being melodic via the repetitive figure in the back half of the measures. Dig how that figure sounds against each chord, as well as against the notes she's singing. As the section continues, Wilkenfeld gradually plays the rhythm in measures 3 and 4 for all of the four-bar phrase. The second ending has a fill which she plays during the section.

Example 2 shows the intro and verse figure from 'Haunted Love'. Wilkenfeld used her Sadowsky NYC five-string with a capo at the third fret. She plays fingerstyle, with her thumb plucking the E string and her index and middle fingers on the D, G and C strings (except for the final Bb chord, which is thumb on the G string, index on the D string, middle finger on the C string). She tells us: "Play the accented notes a little louder and let all the notes ring where possible."

Example 1



Example 2



Bass notes come from diverse sources on the album. 'One Thing After Another' uses a woodwind ensemble with bass clarinet on the bottom for a different colour. 'Corner Painter' was recorded on a baritone acoustic guitar, coupled with Blake Mills' tuned-down electric guitar. Wilkenfeld explains: "I overdubbed some root notes on an organ to fatten up the bottom, but there was enough going on musically between the core trio of Blake, Jeremy and I that we didn't need to pull focus from that with an electric bass-line."

Mills strapped on a Precision bass with flatwounds for the title track. "When we were recording, Blake tried a few different approaches on electric guitar and it all felt like too much on top of an already pretty complex song, so I suggested he play bass. He came up with a very interesting, musical bass-line that I would have never thought to play. Sometimes the most inventive ideas on an instrument come from someone who doesn't primarily play that instrument."

Looking back at Wilkenfeld's career, bass has served as the through line. Although she arrived at the Los Angeles Music Academy to study guitar, she switched to bass in her second semester. She smiles: "People would catch me plucking funky grooves on my guitar. If I saw a bass I wanted to play it. Same with drums. It was obvious to everyone that I wanted to be a rhythm section player. I was hesitant to switch, getting such a late start at 17, but once I picked up the bass it felt very natural to me – like it was home."

Wilkenfeld credits Marcus Miller with being the first bassist to sit down with her and offer his guidance. Soon after, she was drawn to New York City by Wayne Krantz's albums Long To Be Loose and 2 Drink Minimum (both from 1995), which featured the rhythm team of bassist Lincoln Goines and drummer Zach Danziger. Once there, her in-person tutelage continued via Anthony Jackson and Oteil Burbridge.

She admits: "When I got to New York, people told me I sounded like Jaco, and I said 'Who's Jaco?' So I dug into his solo records and his work with Weather Report and Joni Mitchell." Pausing to reflect on her peers, she adds "There are so many great bass players out there. I get inspired by the ones who have a solid groove and create a bass-line that is just as melodic as the top line. James Jamerson is the king of that."

"WHEN I GOT TO NEW YORK, PEOPLE TOLD ME I SOUNDED LIKE JACO, AND I SAID, 'WHO'S JACO?'"

Word of the 'Wonder From Down Under' soon spread, leading Wilkenfeld to play with Krantz, Hiram Bullock and Jeff 'Tain' Watts, and sit in with the Allman Brothers and Susan Tedeschi. Her aforementioned debut album, *Transformation*, resulted in tours with Chick Corea and, of course, her breakout role with Jeff Beck. Online and TV appearances with Beck led to touring and recording with Herbie Hancock and studio time with Prince.

Reflecting on those post-album experiences, she relates: "They were all highly inspirational people to be around. Prince recorded to tape and worked very quickly, and he never wanted to punch in unless it was absolutely necessary. That taught me how to work fast and effectively, and commit to my decisions. Playing in Jeff Beck's and Herbie Hancock's bands was so fun, because it was never about playing for the sake of playing, it was about having diverse musical conversations with notes. When you approach music from that place, everyone has something to say, and something to learn from a conversation. There's no way you can walk away from situations like that without picking up on some of the nuances and the subtleties they bring to the music. I'm one lucky human!"

While Wilkenfeld's Beck association led to performances alongside such rock royalty as Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page, Ringo Starr, Buddy Guy, Joe Walsh, Steven Tyler, Sting and Billy Gibbons, it was a brief meeting with Pete Townshend in 2014 that resulted in her opening for the Who. She explains: "Right after I recorded my album, I sent it to Pete and his reaction was very encouraging and supportive. As it turned out, the opening band for the Who's upcoming tour were having visa issues, so it was a case of very fortunate timing."

She adds: "It was an invaluable experience. Other than a few club shows, I'd never sung a whole set of my music before. I learned how to build a set that keeps the audience engaged, and I built up the stamina to perform it. I also learned how to simplify the music in order to reach the people in the very back rows of stadiums."

As 2019 unfolds, Wilkenfeld will focus on *Love Remains*. Having performed well-received album launch shows in Los Angeles and New York, she will continue to tour in 2019. Of the title, she explains: "The combination of the two words 'Love' and 'Remains' has two very different meanings, both present in the themes of the record: the endurance or the failure of love." That duality also applies to Tal's career, as she evolves from being known simply as a prodigious bassist to a singer-songwriter, composer and producer too.

She has no plans to abandon her role as an in-demand session player, producer or side musician. "I love collaboration," she says. "If I can enhance a project with something that I can contribute creatively, I'm in. Ultimately, I'll listen to what my heart tells me to pursue, as I've always done, and follow the inspiration."

Info: www.talwilkenfeld.com

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GOING TO CALIFORNIA

We headed to the annual NAMM Show in Anaheim, California, from 25 to 27 January to bring you the scoop on the new bass products that will be coming your way in 2019. Get your shopping-list ready...

Words: Joel McIver

If you've never been to NAMM, or National Association of Music Merchants (as no-one ever calls it), the annual convention held for the musical instrument industry, you really owe it to yourself to go. It's essentially three days and four nights of chaos, at ear-bleeding volume levels, packed into the huge Anaheim Convention Center and frequented by thousands upon thousands of musicians, their managers, their families and associated hangers-on.

There are five halls of stands for various manufacturers from all around the world, from every branch of the MI business, from classical music to software to PA systems as well as actual guitars and drums – and as bass enthusiasts, we focused most of our efforts on a single zone, Hall C, where literally hundreds of our favourite brands were represented.

A few of the major manufacturers – Fender, Gibson, ESP and Yamaha among them – have much larger, individual rooms to themselves, but for most of our trip we stuck with luthiers whose presence is confined to a room-sized stand or smaller. It's a very real chance to meet people and gets hands-on with basses, amps and effects, and in that sense it's similar to events such as the London Bass Guitar Show or Bass Player Live – but on a vast scale and with the added burden of jetlag.

We got to meet most of our bass gear heroes, but not all, simply because time was short – so what follows is the tip of the NAMM Show bass iceberg, and in alphabetical order, because why not? Enjoy!

64 AUDIO announced the cunningly-named N8 Custom In-Ear Monitor, the result of a collaboration with the great bassist Nathan East, who was playing on the massive stage outside the front entrance of the Convention Center for large chunks of the week. With an MSRP of (gulp) $1,699, the N8 is said to deliver great clarity across all frequencies, with the key point being "abundant headroom available in the lower end of the audible spectrum".

AGUILAR, the manufacturer of high-quality amps, effects and pickups, announced their new Super Splits – hum-cancelling pickups designed to create "crisp and open treble, barking midrange and huge lows in a soapbar shape". They can be paired with an

onboard preamp such as Aguilar's OBP-1, 2 or 3, and two sets are available: the AG 4SSP-D1 for four-string basses and the AG 5SSP-D2 for fives.

ASHDOWN had a fantastic show, with plenty for lovers of the loud low end to enjoy. We feasted our eyes on a custom Head 22 devoted to Shavo Odadjian of System Of A Down, a new headphone

System Of A Down bassist Shavo's new amp

preamp called the Tone Pocket (weighing only 272g!) and the Phone Box, a useful gizmo that you attach to your solid-state amp head for headphones performance. It's also a DI box and has a Line Out to an audio interface if you prefer. There's also a new range of Ashdown effects pedals, the Triple Shot, Guy Pratt's new signature effect the Macchiato Comp, Studio Comp, Velvet Comp and Type 23. More details

when we get our hands on them. Add the Ashdown OriginAL 110 compact 1x10" speaker cabinet, rated at 150 watts at 8 ohms, a new ABM 300 head and the CL-310DH 3x10" Dual Horn speaker column, and it's obvious why bass-heads were keen to visit the stand.

BERGANTINO's newest addition to its Holographic (HG) amp series, the HG412, comes in at 64 pounds and has a sealed cabinet design plus a high-quality tweeter and rear-firing woofer for a three-dimensional sound field. Jim Bergantino himself walked us through this luscious product and its range of useful tones was highly impressive, even through the wall of sound (mostly slap lines in E minor) emanating from nearby bass stands.

A veritable wall of Darkglass gear to drool at

DARKGLASS are launching two new bass amps, the new Microtubes V2 and the Alpha-Omega 900. The former delivers the tones of the company's B3K and Vintage Microtubes effects, while the latter has Alpha and Omega options plus a studio-grade VCA compressor and a six-band graphic EQ. Both amps are MIDI programmable and feature three different storable virtual cabs.

DINGWALL were celebrating their Combustion model's 10th anniversary in style, releasing a model with an 'amethyst-burst' finish, a quilt-veneered body, laminated maple neck (with carbon fibre, of course) and various luxury options. The new five-string variant of their amazing D-Bird impressed us so much that we awarded it Best Bass Of NAMM 2019 in partnership with our colleagues at MusicRadar.

EHX asked us to step on its new Bass Mono Synth, a unit which transforms a bass guitar into 11 different bass synthesisers without any modifications, special pickups or MIDI. We coaxed a range of tones out of it, from a warm, filter-like sound to a terrifying wall of sound. Recommended!

EMG hosted a whole range of BGM and BP alumni, in particular our recent cover stars Frank Bello of Anthrax and David Ellefson of Megadeth, whose new signature pickups are set to dominate the world of heavy metal, if past performance is any indicator. Slayer's Tom Araya also gets a new signature set.

FISHMAN were launching their new range of Fluence bass pickups, and impressive bits of kit they are too. Covering four- and five-string bass configurations, the new units come in at an affordable price – exact numbers are still to announced, but 'the low three figures' seems about right.

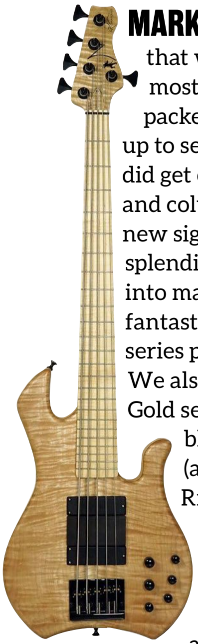
(top) Vulfpeck bassist Joe Dart unboxes his new Stingray; (above) Derek Smalls unleashes the heavy metal fury

FENDER have revived the amazing Precision bass which Guns N'Roses bassist Duff McKagan used to record with GNR in the 1980s (ask your dad). The newest iteration of Duff's signature bass has a 'Modern C'-shaped quartersawn maple neck and a rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays, along with the number 12 at the twelfth fret. A Hipshot Xtender and the combination of a vintage-style split-coil pickup with a Seymour Duncan STKJ2B Jazz Bass single-coil bridge unit adds value.

HARTKE introduced a new HD508 combo, offering 500 watts of Class D power through a 4x8" HyDrive speaker configuration in a box weighing in at a relatively back-friendly 49lb. HyDrive speakers are famously based on paper/aluminium hybrid cone drivers, and we're looking forward to turning the EQ up for that well-known tone. New XL Series V2 cabs with all-aluminum speakers also debuted at the show in 2x10 and 4x10 models.

The great Nathan East wows the crowds at NAMM's outside stage

KEMPER amp-simulating hardware may be the dark side of the force for many musicians, but we couldn't help but be intrigued by these futuristic chunks of hardware – so we took a pleasant meeting with the company's Thomas Wendt, who walked us through the bass-specific tones that his Profiler unit offers us. While we could fill an entire magazine with the functions of this tasty bit of kit, let's just say that yes, the rumours are true – Kempers do supply all the bass tones, ever.



MARKBASS had a massive stand that we couldn't get near for most of the show, thanks to the packed crowds who were lining up to see the bass celebs play. We did get close enough to our buddy and columnist Stuart Hamm, whose new signature Markbass amp looks splendid. Markbass are also moving into making bass guitars, with a fantastic Richard Bona Kilimanjaro series pulling in a lot of attention. We also got to play their new MB Gold series bass, possibly the most blinging bass at the show (apart from those at Jens Ritter's stand).

MXR'S new Dyna Comp Bass Compressor has, the venerable FX-makers tell us, an integrated circuit for quiet operation and transparency, a Clean control that adds in an unaffected signal to maintain low end integrity and a Tone control that adjusts the upper midrange to retain tonal dynamics. Review on its way!

RICKENBACKER never let us play their basses at NAMM, which is probably fair given the number of sweaty-fingered and/or flu-bearing humans that arrive in huge numbers at their stand. Still, it was frustrating to be denied the ability to play their ravishing five-string 4003 models. The Ricky staff told us that more than a few bassists are spooked by the shape of the new pickups. We're not overly upset by that particular feature but hey, there's no accounting for taste.

It's Lee Sklar! The man is an icon in our world

Juan Alderete delivers the low-end goods

Sometime Van Halen bassist Michael Anthony

SADOWSKY's new spruce core singlecut bass model pulled in plenty of visitors, with the tonewood chosen for its musically resonant nature. Paired with a hardwood top and back, the instrument features a 24-fret bolt-on neck, Sadowsky's mid-boost preamp, and Sadowsky Soapbar pickups.

SIMS GUITAR WORKS pulled in a huge line of admirers for their Enfield bass range and renowned Super Quad pickup series, in particular when our cover star from a couple of issues back – the great Rudy Sarzo – arrived to sign copies of Bass Guitar and Bass Player magazines. We're not ashamed to say that a few manly tears sprang to our eyes as we saw Rudy representing us and the pioneering Sims pickups that are fitted to his signature Spector bass. Perhaps it was the jetlag?

STONEFIELD's founder Tomm Stanley has launched a series of bass cabs, the Mighty Mini Series and the Mid-Size Series. The line-up begins with three single-

driver cabinets, a 6.5", an 8" and a 10". These lightweight, immediately identifiable cabs feature aircraft-grade laminates to keep the weight down, plus Stonefield's own unique surfacing compound.

WARWICK released several beautiful new basses for 2019, prominent among them the Limited Edition and Masterbuilt Corvettes, each featuring Californian buckeye burl tops.

YAMAHA offered us not one but two walls of basses, prominent among which were the Nathan East signature model reviewed elsewhere in this issue, plus the signature models belonging to John Patitucci and Billy Sheehan. While 2019 won't be a year full of new models, you'll recall the coverage we gave the new BB range as well as the affordable TRBX basses, all of which looked as slick as ever.

Those esteemed luthiers, amp-makers and effects manufacturers who we only saw in passing include **Mesa/ Boogie**, who have a new Subway WD-800 amp and Subway Plus Bass DI-Preamp on the way. **Schecter** announced their new bass range for 2019, featuring Diamond, Riot and SLS Elite variants. **Dunlop** were showing off their M282 Bass Dyna Comp Mini and M280 Vintage Bass Octave pedals. **Vigier**'s lustrous new GV Hollowbody bass features a glossy contoured cut-out in Purple Fade and Anti-Tabacoo Matte. **Ernie Ball** allowed us to witness the unboxing of Vulfpeck bassist Joe Dart's signature Stingray, and we loved their show-only deluxe models and the new short-scale range. Strandberg's futuristic Boden bass had us in awe of its ace three-sided neck shape. **EBS** have a splendid new Microbass 3 unit on the way. **Chowny** were representing their unique brand of Brit innovation. **Spector**, now under the auspices of Korg USA, were showing off a scintillating range of basses and artist showcases. **Orange**'s amp demo room was our go-to refuge when we wanted to get away from all the noise and make some of our own with Glenn Hughes's signature bass rig. **Trace Elliott** have new combos on the way that are begging to be paired up with the amazing Elf micro head. Lastly, a shout-out to the staff at **Future Publishing**'s stand, representing us like the splendid people they are!

When it came to live events, NAMM 2019 outdid itself – one must-attend show in particular being a 'Bass Off' in which bass players were offered the chance to outperform none other than Derek 'Not Harry Shearer' Smalls, sometime of Spinal Tap. However, top of our list was the annual two-night Bass Bash, produced and presented by our chum Toné Wellington; we were privileged to have the Bass Guitar and Bass Player magazine logos appear on the long list of sponsors of the events.

David Vause

THE BASS BOSS!

David Vause

Toné Compito Wellington, producer of the annual Bass Bash, was delighted with how the two-night event went. As she told us: "The excitement of the Bass Bash, for me, is seeing the show come together after months of planning. The fact that we have so many world-class musicians, sponsoring gear companies and a growing audience from around the globe speaks volumes about the bass community. If I had to pick a highlight for each night, for Thursday I'd say that Darryl Anders and AgapéSoul's already powerful performance was supercharged by special guests Marcus Miller and Eric Gales. On Friday, the Brandon Brown Collective brought a 12-piece band; it was serious old-school funk! The entire crowd was dancing."

The Bass Bash isn't just a celebration of all things low-end: Wellington and her team don't work for profit, but contribute to a worthy cause. This year they raised enough funds to contribute two scholarships to Victor Wooten's Center For Music And Nature, a 501(c)3 non-profit organisation. Wooten has long made it his mission to enable young musicians to study education – and although Wellington is too modest to mention it herself, the effort she puts in every year goes a long way towards helping that happen. We salute you, Toné and Victor.

David Vause

The number of stellar bassists which Toné had booked to play the two nights at Anaheim's Phoenix Club was remarkable in itself. Mike Bendy and Sam Smith began the evening of Thursday 24 January; the former, based in Brooklyn, New York, is sponsored by Fodera basses and Trickfish Amplification, while the latter – also a New Yorker – wields a mean MTD six-string. They were followed by the great Wojtek Pilichowski, featured in our last issue, whose two bands, series of educational publications and fiendishly advanced skills have made him a star in our world and beyond. His set, delivered with Maruszczyk and Aguilar gear, was one to remember.

Following Pilichowski, our friend Darryl Anders led his band AgapéSoul through a blistering set, assisted by surprise guests Marcus Miller and Eric Gales. As you'll know if you read his interview with us back in November, Anders specialises in huge, supportive (but funk-heavy) lines that shake the stage, which was exactly the effect we experienced at the Bass Bash. No wonder his debut album, Believe In Love, made the top of the British soul charts.

He's another Trickfish endorser, and little wonder; the gear is great (we've tried it). The acclaimed Turkish Cypriot bassist Oytun Ersan and the French bass hero Hadrien Feraud finished off the first night with two awe-inspiring sets. Not a bad night for bass lovers, right?

Friday 25 January's evening gathering was equally impressive, kicking off with Ariel Garcia, a Berklee graduate of astonishing skill, and followed up by Doug Johns, a bassist for five solo albums under his belt. His soulful set paved the way for Brandon Brown and his Collective, a 12-piece band with a huge number of high-profile sessions on their resumés. Mike Pope, a master of upright and electric bass, is another seasoned musician, with the added bonus of being a man who designed Fodera preamps before establishing his own Mike Pope Design company.

And who better to wind up the Bass Bash than Gary Willis? A quick rundown of his career includes sessions with Wayne Shorter, Allan Holdsworth and many more, while he's also released a host of essential work as co-leader of Tribal Tech and a solo artist.

It's little wonder that the Phoenix Club was packed full of enthusiastic crowds, pro and amateur bassists and even a few magazine journalists. Toné asked us to say a few words from the stage, which we duly did, although the message we tried to convey was simply that it was an honour to be involved. It's true, too – attending events like this is a privilege that we'll always remember. Why not book your trip to Bass Bash 2020 now?

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Bobbing And Weaving

Bobby Wooten held down the low end for Talking Heads legend David Byrne on his recent *American Utopia* tour. He tells us how with Byrne's rehearsal technique, everything started making sense

Interview: Jacob Barlow **Photo:** Getty

There are two types of chaos: punk chaos, when there's no plan B, and even plan A is fairly sketchy – and jazz chaos, when everyone knows their part so well they don't even have to think about it anymore. Rehearse something enough, and you can break away from it in new ways.

David Byrne's career could arguably be understood as a movement from the former sort of chaos to the latter. As the frontman of Talking Heads, he was associated with new wave, a genre that moved away from punk towards something more disciplined and experimental. Nonetheless, early Taking Heads were learning to play music as they went, their sound evolving with each gig.

These days Byrne works with virtuoso touring and session musicians to realise his vision. He still thrives on chaos, but now it's the sort of chaos that's made by people who know exactly what they're doing.

Enter Bobby Wooten, the bassist who played on Byrne's *American Utopia* tour (We know what you're thinking, but no – no relation to Victor). The tour supported the album of the same name, but was also

a work of art in its own right, and Wooten was central to its creation. On stage with Byrne, he dances through the thick of action, playing some of the greatest bass-lines ever written while clearly having the time of his life. This enthusiastic presence is just as engaging when I meet him in person. He answers questions with easy sincerity.

How did you start on bass, Bobby?
I was born into a gospel music family in Chicago, Illinois. My dad was a keyboardist, so the first thing I played was piano. Then some of my friends who loved Blink 182 wanted to play together and someone had to play the bass. One thing led to another, and I fell in love with bass. My dad played keys for Marcus Miller in the Jamaica Boys, so when he played me those records it shot everything off.

How did you get the gig with David Byrne?
I worked with him in 2017; he wrote a musical in New York called *Joan Of Arc* and I was playing bass for that. He was like: "I'll be calling soon". When I got the slot on the tour that was amazing, for sure.

David Byrne's bass-lines aren't the most complicated, but they're absolutely front and centre.
I agree. Where the parts were written by Tina [Weymouth, original Talking Heads bassist] or some other bassist from David's work outside of Talking Heads, I enjoy them as the part that they are. In the beginning I was trying some licks on 'Burning Down The House'. I found myself thinking 'That's not necessary at all'. The bass-line is the heart of the groove, so I just give it all I can.

How do you get that perfect feel?
I try to exist within the song. Any style I'm playing, I'm listening to the vocals, listening to the groove, and following my heart. If I'm talking about a groove, that's just the way a song makes me feel, plus basic phrasing things like long notes and short notes. When Talking Heads had just started, Tina was fresh to playing bass, so there's some of the songs that I started out playing my way, but when I was listening to them on the records and the live shows, she would play them a different way, so now I do it like that.

> "THE BASS-LINE IS THE HEART OF THE GROOVE, SO I JUST GIVE IT ALL I CAN"

Your setlist has some Talking Heads classics, some later material, and a couple of curveballs.
The breakdown is 21 songs: seven Talking Heads classics, seven from *American Utopia* and seven things from other albums, collaborations and things like that. The new album sounds more modern, but what I love about this experience is that as a writer and producer I'm learning a lot from David. He likes songs that, when they start, are just there. There's no need for an elaborate intro – like 'Once In A Lifetime', that's really just three notes for the entire song. If I'm doing the single, 'Everybody's Coming To My House', for instance, I stay true to the part, but it allows me a little bit more freedom to play licks and to add something. If there are moments to breathe and stretch then I do, but it's still very direct.

Any other projects you can tell us about?
I wrote for the *Empire* TV show, there's the upcoming *Moulin Rouge* broadway show, and I'm working on exciting projects with Benjamin Clementine, Jake Troth and Loki Moon. I'm also working with David on something – I can't say more, but stay tuned.

What basses do you play?
I've got a P-Bass. There's this new company that I'm using for strings, MJC Ironworks. I've got steel strings on there. They last ages and I love their character, the way they feel and the brightness that they add. My other bass for the show is a 1965 Harmony H22 with a semi-hollow body. For that I have flat Pyramid strings. The basses have completely different characters. We're running everything through a Kemper Audio system. There's no amps or anything onstage. We've dialled up the effects we want for each song, and my guitar tech triggers it from the side, from song to song, and even in the middle of songs. The tones you can get are amazing.

Do you play five-strings at all?
When I started rehearsals I also had a five-string Pensa-Suhr bass, which I love, but the show has a lot of changes, particularly with the drummers switching harnesses – there's like six drummers up there. What the crew has to do on the sides of the stage is wild, so I realised it would be easier if I didn't have three basses. There's some songs where I would have loved to have it, but overall it was the right choice.

The show is pretty incredible.
Yeah, this is my first time doing a production where for the first week of rehearsal we did six 10-hour days. It was all music and singing. Then the next three weeks were all choreography. Two of us are dancers first, but also singers. The rest of the band does a lot of choreography too. The awesome thing is that with David there is a looseness, and good amount of improvisation, even though a lot of the show has to happen exactly right.

You dance around like a crazy person up there...
The show's on an empty stage, which opened things up. David wanted characters, people showing their personalities. I'm always the one who's moving around on stage – but being given free rein, I learnt the moments when I was going to be improvising licks, and where I needed to be as a dancer. It got more and more comfortable and it reached a point where we could improvise and play off of each other. David told me about *Stop Making Sense*; when one of the guitars did something that really worked he'd be like 'Yeah, keep doing that' – it wasn't choreographed but it became a moment in the show. That's how we worked on this. ■

Info: www.bobbywooten.com, @b3wooten

Knight Time

Luthier Jens Ritter occupies the point where bass-making meets art. His bass guitars range from the merely expensive to the eye-wateringly costly, and have been purchased by museums and art collectors as much as bass players. How does he do it? Who buys these things? And what the deuce does sushi have to do with bass guitars? We went to Ritter HQ in rural Germany to find out

Interview:: Joel McIver

Travel articles written by people who visit country places always begin with clichés such as "Tucked away in the remote hillside landscape of [location]..." and continue along similar lines. Well, in the case of Ritter Guitars the cliché is true; Jens Ritter's rural luthiery is genuinely tucked away into amazing (and yes, remote) German countryside in Deidesheim, not far from the medieval town of Heidelberg, and utterly easy on the eye, as these pictures illustrate.

We're here today to meet Ritter himself, who we would describe as "the Willy Wonka of bass" if that description wasn't insultingly comedic. There's nothing comedic whatsoever about Ritter basses, although words such as 'psychedelic' and 'avant-garde' do come to mind. Oh, and 'expensive': Ritter basses routinely come in at the 30,000 euro mark, and often go much, much higher, all the way in fact to a 250,000 euro guitar, encrusted with real diamonds, which sold back in 2011.

We want to find out why Ritter ('Knight' in German, hence our ace title quip) bothers to make these phenomenally costly instruments, how his brand survives in a world that is, frankly, broke – and how he makes his business work at the sharp end of commercial art. He pours us a glass of local wine and begins...

How long have you been in business, Jens, and what is the Ritter mission?
I've been doing this for 25 years, since I was 21 years old. In the beginning it was all about technology and sound, because I'm a mechanical engineer by training – but these days I want to push the boundaries of electric bass. This is why I put diamonds on them. This is why I had an instrument in my showroom with a retail price of 250,000 euros. It was bought in 2011 or

Jo Teichmann

"I DON'T ONLY MAKE TOOLS FOR MUSICIANS. I MAKE CULTURAL ARTEFACTS"

thereabouts by a person who plays with a lot of people who you know. He's a fan of the beauty of the electric guitar and bass.

I read that you immersed an instrument in wine for a year. Is that true?
Correct. I fermented the body of an instrument in a barrel of wine for a year. One night, after drinking a lot of wine, we cut down an oak tree in the local forest and my friend, who is a barrelmaker, made a barrel out of the wood and I made a body out of it. Then we put the body into the barrel, which contained the best riesling white wine, and it stayed there for a whole year before I took it out. Of course, my intention was not to make a high-end instrument out of it. Both the wine and the guitar were auctioned off for a children's cancer charity.

How many basses do you produce?
I make 72 basses a year, and we're booked up for the next two years, maybe more.

What is their price range?
Prices for my basses start at 5000 euros, but I usually sell instruments for 20,000 to 30,000 euros. I have one for 85,000 euros, and a few for 30 to 40,000 euros. This year I've built three instruments over 100,000 euros and at least four around the 80,000 mark.

Without meaning to be shallow and focus only on the prices, those are huge sums of money, aren't they?
I know that a lot of people can't afford to buy my instruments, but I'm not making them because I want to buy a Ferrari one day, I'm making them because this is my idea of instrument-making.

So the prices aren't necessarily a measure of the instruments' function?
Well, I don't only make tools for musicians. What I produce are cultural items. My basses hang in museums because they purchase them, and so do art collectors. I've heard other luthiers say, 'This is stupid, it's a musical instrument but it's hanging in a collector's house'. I told this to the director of the Museum Of Arts And Design in New York and he said, 'You'll die in 40 years, Jens, but those instruments will stay for hundreds of years, and one day they will be played. You may not know about it, but it will happen anyway'.

Do guitar companies ever ask you if they can license an affordable Ritter line?
Every year, absolutely. The money would be good, but it would not be fun because

I don't like compromise. I'd rather donate a guitar and a bass to young musicians. I have a lot of teenagers coming here, and I always say 'Go and buy a cheap bass for 200 euros, bring it here and I'll dress the frets for free. I'll get you a pickup, you can do the shielding yourself and then you'll have a good working instrument'.

You're a bass player, I assume.

Yes. Even when I was a kid I was addicted to bass frequencies, so when a friend of mine formed a band called the Rotten Apples, I joined. I had never played bass, so I went into a pawnshop and bought a Johnny Paul 2, the worst bass I have ever seen. It was horrible. I played it for two weeks and we did our first gig.

What kind of music was it?

Punk rock: three chords and a lot of beer! Then I played hard rock, ska-punk, reggae, fusion and finally funk, all in local bands. One day I repaired a fault in my bass, and then I repaired instruments belonging to friends, so I asked myself if I could make a bass, because I always liked creating things. At the time I was working as a mechanical engineer, so I knew a lot about construction, and I learned a lot about woodworking from my grandfather, who was a carpenter.

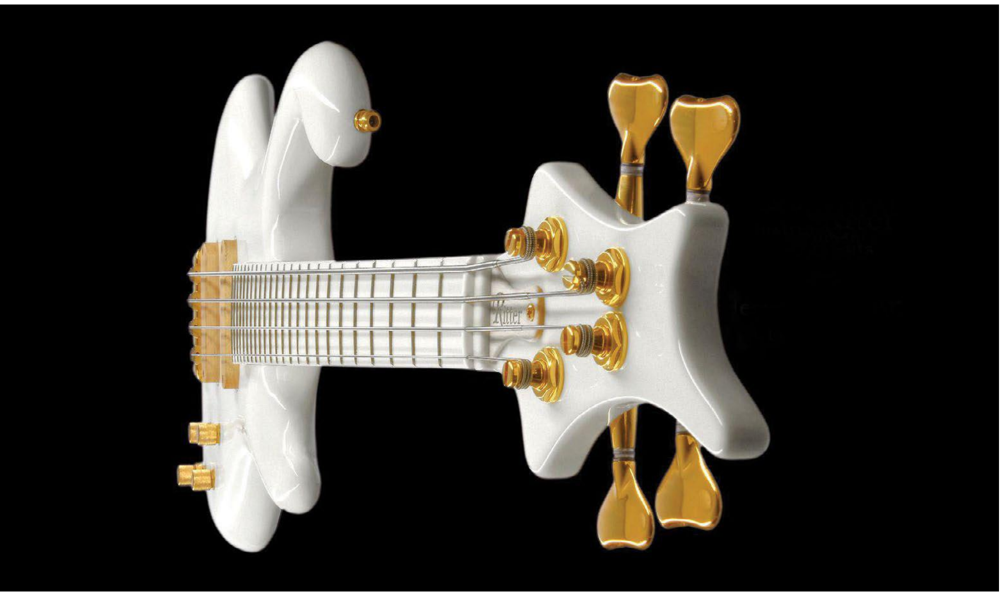
When did you start making basses?

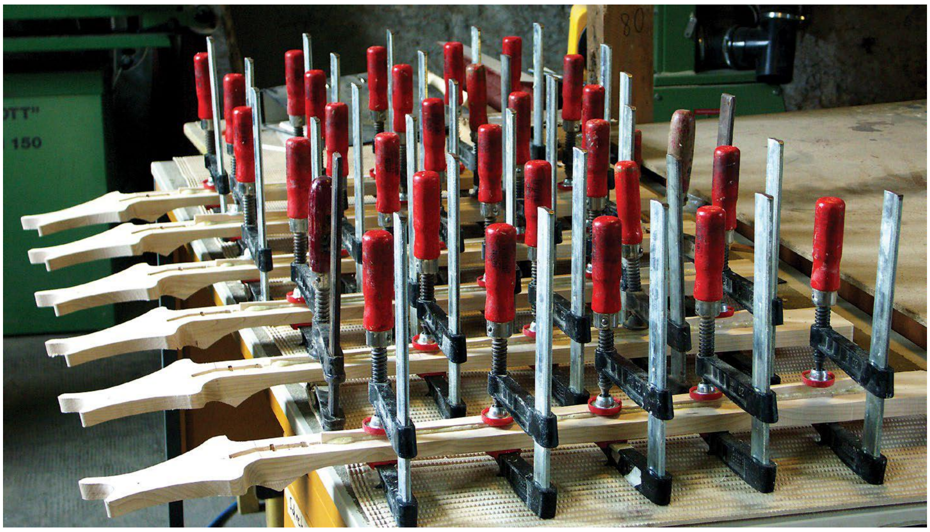
In 1996 I made two four-strings, one fretted and one fretless. I still have them in the workshop. I took them to the bass editor of a German guitar magazine and he asked me to leave them with him. A few months later he sent them back with a letter that said 'Very nice' and that was that, but soon after that I got a call from a friend saying 'Go and buy the new magazine!' The editor had written a three-page article about my basses, saying 'This young guy tells me that these are the first two basses he's made. I don't believe him!' which was the biggest compliment. So in 2000 I left my job in mechanical engineering and began Ritter full-time.

Did you study guitar-building?

No – the biggest point in my favour is that I never trained as a guitar builder. I use woods that normal guitar makers would never use. I use construction details that they would never consider. I had to reinvent the wheel for myself, and I discovered a lot of stuff. My neck joint, for example. When Ritter began, I had no idea what the differences were between neck-through, bolt-on and glued-in neck joints, so I took wood from a single tree and built three basses, one of each kind. I threw the glued-in model in the garbage immediately and tested the other two. I'd heard that the neck-through was faster, with more presence and brilliance, but in fact the bolt-on turned out to be much funkier. I decided that bolt-ons would be my thing.

> "I NEVER TRAINED AS A GUITAR BUILDER. I HAD TO REINVENT THE WHEEL"





How did you decide which direction to go in as a luthier?

I've always oriented myself towards my personal tastes, so in the beginning I made super-funky basses; deep, low bass tones are what I love. Later I became more of a Jazz bass guy, so I made a Cora bass with Josh Dunham, who played with Prince at the time, and very much later I made Prince's Isabella bass, which is my P-Bass. In between I made the R8 and other different experiments, such as basses with the Lightwave optical pickup, which I liked a lot for fretless instruments.

Do you ever seek business advice?

I've never made a business decision depending on market research. If I wanted to make a green bass when red basses were fashionable, I made a green one. People told me this was totally stupid, and then two years later they did the same thing as me. And I love to experiment with new tonewoods, new technical details, new psychological content.

What's that?

It's very simple, actually. The psychological content of an instrument is highly important. For example, I made a very simple bass and sent it, rough-sanded, to a

customer. This customer had a new baby, so they painted the baby's feet and pressed them against the bass. I clear-coated the bass and, because of the baby footprints on it, there's a totally different connection to the player. I recognised that it's important to find out if the customer really wants block inlays or round ones, or whatever. Does he want this wood or that wood? These are huge factors when it comes to the playing spirit of the musician. The base for that connection is perfect sounds, perfect ergonomics and perfect playability, of course; that is understood. If you have a psychological connection to the instrument but it plays or sounds bad, then that's no good at all.

Do you get much time to experiment with new designs?

Of the six instruments we make a month, five are orders from customers and one is an idea that I have. I have a new clientele; collectors of my omakase basses. Omakase is a type of Japanese sushi. If you like high-end sushi, you don't buy California rolls or tuna, you only order omakase, which means you say to the chef, 'I trust you. Cook what you have today'. He cooks, you eat, and you give him an amount of money. You're paying for the chef's expertise. I started it as a joke, but it's become a totally serious business. I offer a blind instrument, starting at 15,000 euros. I make you something for whatever sum of money you provide. You can tell me if you want a bass or a guitar, or if you dislike red dots, or any other parameters, and I'll make you an instrument. In this way the customer gives me total artistic freedom, which is really cool.

How hands-on are you with bass production?

The designing is all done by me. I don't do any basic woodwork any more, so I don't glue wood, I don't drill holes, I don't rout pickups or mount bridges or solder electronics or put the tuners on. I do the shaping by hand and some staining, and I do the end setup and install any special components myself.

What have you got left to achieve, Jens?

Oh, I have enough ideas for the next 400 years! I could give you a list right now of at least 50 technical things I want to achieve with Ritter instruments, such as a new design for a frictionless bass tremolo, and a new kind of floating bridge, for example. I also have tons of ideas for shapes using new ergonomic factors that I want to explore. And there is my new Sleeping Beauty series. These are made with the highest quality tonewoods, and I use diamonds and sapphires on them – and there's no jack socket on the back. I seal the backplate with wax, and laser-engrave the day when I tuned the instrument for the first time. I also laser-engrave the date when you're allowed to open the seal and play it. It's the same date, but 100 years into the future. In the synth-bass era, I'm looking into the future – and my plan is that this will restart the electric bass movement again.

https://ritter-instruments.com

BAY AREA BASS

Bassist, studio owner, long-time *Bass Player* writer and podcaster Jonathan Herrera recalls a career at the thick end of the low end

Interview: Joel McIver

I was born and grew up in Los Angeles, and I've basically been a professional bass player since I got out of school. After graduating from USC, I attended what is now the Los Angeles College of Music. I played piano all throughout childhood, and I picked up bass when I was around 11 and started to get into rock'n'roll. For some reason I was drawn to the bass, but it was also because my best friend at the time had a guitar. I figured if I got a bass we'd be two-thirds of a band.

When I think of how piano has been beneficial to me as a bass player, it's having learned to read music that first comes to mind. Also, when I began to explore harmony and chords, I was able to visualise the keyboard in my mind; far preferable to the bass, given that there are multiple places to play the same notes. Keyboard makes you think of music in a kind of expansive, full-range way, which I think good bass players need. To do our job well, we often need to consider how we fit into the larger group.

The first bass players I noticed and who inspired me were Les Claypool and Flea, mostly because they were so easy to identify by their sound, style, and look. I soon discovered that there was a lot more to bass than that kind of aggressive, brash playing, of course. My parents bought me a Billy Sheehan video early on, too. I love Billy, but he's probably not the person to emulate when you're just beginning to learn. Nowadays, I'm most infatuated with the playing of Anthony Jackson, Pino Palladino and Steve Swallow.

I didn't take lessons initially, but I took to it pretty quickly. I played all through high school and did all the traditional things, like playing for assemblies and musicals. I grew up Catholic, so I also played in church a lot. I was lucky because the average church band in LA is generally of fairly high quality, so when I was playing in church at 14, everyone else in the band was a working professional. That improved my musicianship immensely by learning to blend with an ensemble and read charts. I also played in a ton of garage bands with friends, and I finally played my first real gig at the Roxy in Hollywood when I was 16.

When I was 21 I moved from LA to San Francisco, where I've been ever since. After a year or so of trying to plug into the scene up there, I was starting to get a little frustrated, but then I got wind of an opportunity at *Bass Player* magazine in 2002. I interviewed for the post of Technical Editor, but I never thought I would get it, because I felt unqualified and just way too young. The job description said something like 'You must love bass, and you must want to play all the gear' – and I thought to myself, 'This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If I don't get it I'm going to move to Africa and join the Peace

Corps or something.' But it worked out and completely changed my life, making me a relevant figure in this field that I had always felt peripheral to while growing up.

I've always taken both jobs really seriously. I was really serious about playing music and the two roles of bassist and writer fed each other a lot. An important early influence on me was the amazing Kai Eckhardt, who first gave me some lessons and then started recommending me for gigs and to sub for him in his own bands. Through him I met the band Garaj Mahal and toured with them a bit, and by the mid to late 2000s things were starting to happen for me musically. By 2010 I decided that I was going to play music full-time and stepped down from *Bass Player*, where I had become Editor-In-Chief, although I continued to write for the magazine.

A formative moment for me was around 2007 when I really got into synth bass, which to me is no less interesting a way to manifest bass than bass guitar. I got a gig with Miguel Migs, an iconic deep house

"TO DO OUR JOB, WE NEED TO CONSIDER HOW WE FIT INTO THE GROUP"

producer; I toured with him and played keyboard bass and bass guitar. It helps if you have a reputation as a musician who can double on both instruments, and that was tracking where rock and dance music was going at the time, too.

After that I joined MoeTar, a really interesting sort of pop-prog project, playing key bass on a Moog alongside a bass guitar player. We figured out a lot of interesting ways to play together. And then about four years ago I became involved with a project called Cathedrals, a dreamy electro-pop duo which had a few hits. I came in to help transition their studio music into a live experience, and I actually ended up juggling guitar, bass guitar and two keyboards on a number of tours.

Several years ago, I finally decided to go all-in on recording and mix engineering at my own recording studio. Over the years I'd been collecting mics, preamps and so on — I've always felt drawn to the process of making records, from both the technical and creative sides. I now have my own place in Oakland, called Dime Studios. It's really exciting to feel deeply challenged by a new musical path again, which isn't to say bass won't perpetually be challenging, it's just that I'm so deeply

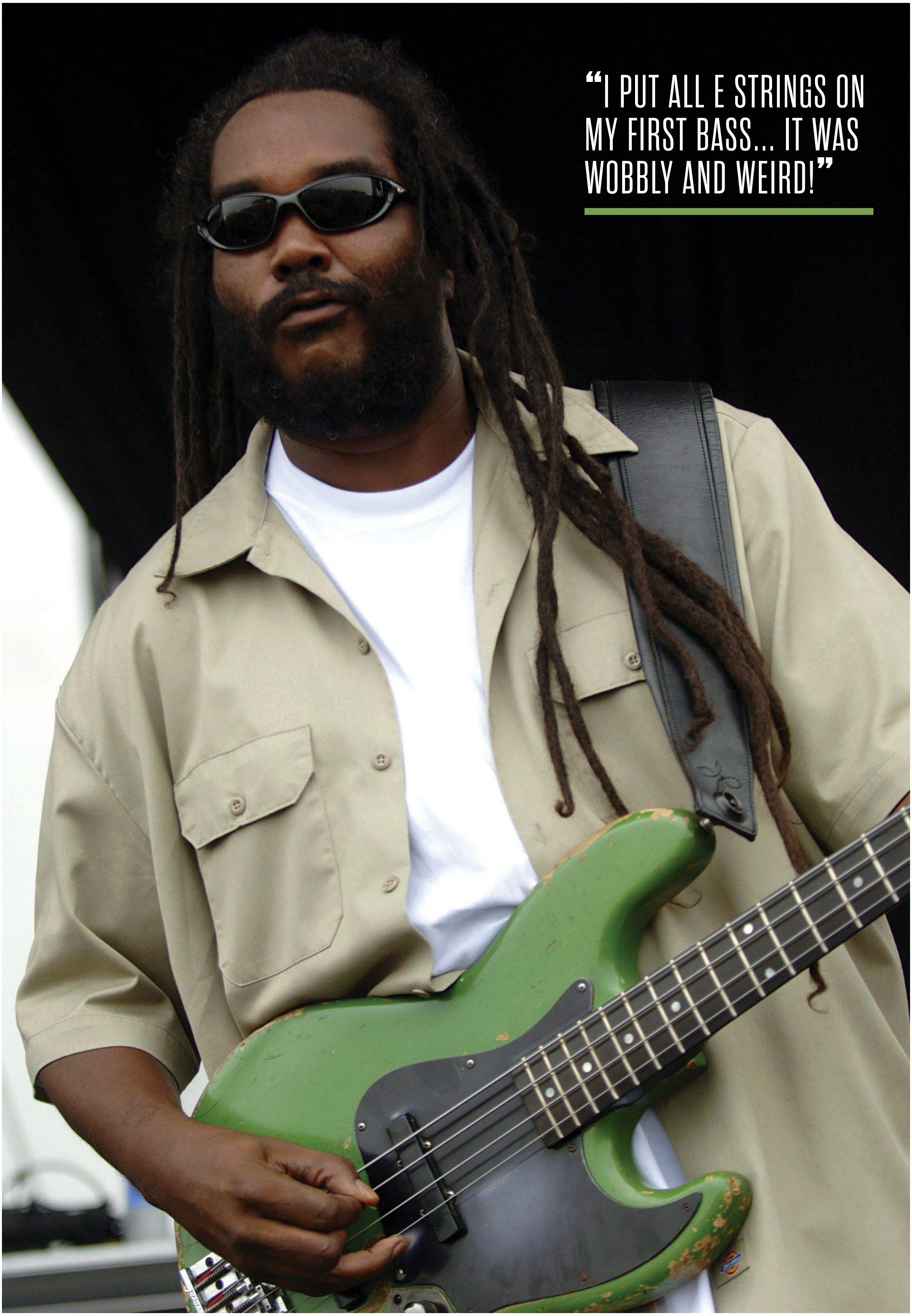
GEAR

Basses/synth Moollon P-Classic, B524, and J-Classic V, Fender Pino Palladino Custom Shop Precision, '66 Fender Jazz, Nordstrand Acinonyx, '69 Matsumoku short-scale, CallowHill MDM 5, F Bass BN5, Moog Sub 37, Dunlop and Thomastik strings
Effects | Too many to list here! Lots of modern and vintage, from Dunlop to Z-Vex and everything in between
Amps | Aguilar DB750, Bergantino HD-322 cab, Wayne Jones WJ 2x10, Sunn 200L

acquainted with the culture and process, due largely to my time at the magazine and as a player. The recording world has offered me an entire universe of new skills to develop and put to use, and I love the tangible product that emerges from the recording process. I also love the gear, and actually modify, design, and fix my own (and some clients') audio equipment.

I also have a podcast called What Makes Music?, which I'm doing in partnership with Carey Nordstrand. I've always admired Carey and his amazing gear, so when he suggested a podcast I was immediately interested, because I'm a huge fan of podcasts and I've been told I should do one for a long time. So many things need to happen for music to come together —technically, emotionally, psychologically and socially — and we aim to discover what those things are through interviews with some of the best musicians working today.

Info: www.jonherrera.com. Visit Dime Studios at www.thedimestudios.com and check out the What Makes Music podcast at www.whatmakesmusicpod.com.



"I PUT ALL E STRINGS ON MY FIRST BASS… IT WAS WOBBLY AND WEIRD!"

PUNK **SOUL** BROTHER

The powerhouse behind DC hardcore pioneers Bad Brains, Darryl Jenifer, talks to us about what makes him tick

Interview: Calum Harvie **Images:** Getty

Few bands in hardcore punk have made an impact quite like Washington, DC's Bad Brains. For over 40 years this pioneering quartet have fused punk, reggae, funk and heavy metal to create a breathtaking style which belies the received wisdom of hardcore as being a relatively simple, or even atavistic, genre. That's in no small part thanks to the contributions of the band's affable bassist, Darryl Jenifer, whose background in funk and soul helped to shape Bad Brains' singular sound.

"I started out on saxophone, would you believe?" Jenifer laughs. "A long time ago, when I was in fifth grade, my cousin had a 70s funk band in DC. I was fascinated by it all and I asked if I could be in a band, and he said 'Yeah, but you have to learn something and do good in school'. So I went back to school and they only had a marching band, so I said I'd play sax. But it was too much – I just didn't have the patience to learn music. I mainly did a lot of blowing and having fun with it. I wasn't the scholastic type."

"Later I got a guitar for Christmas – and this might sound weird, but I seemed to already know how to play. Like, I started playing on it and I already seemed to know 'Get Ready' by the Temptations. My mother said she didn't know where I got that from. Then when I was about 13, one of my homes had a guitar, and we sat down and played 'Get Ready'. It was my go-to 'I know how to play guitar' song. That's when it took off for me, playing with neighbourhood bands."

For as long as he remembers, Jenifer says, he has felt compelled to do things differently. "That has been a blessing. I come from a funk, Motown background, but in my teenage formative years with the guitar, I wanted to be not necessarily Hendrix, but more like Al Di Meola. I was fascinated by the technical aspects of the guitar. Funk was something that was always around, but I also liked Black Sabbath, which was odd for where I came from. I remember listening to a radio station which played rock music in DC, and my cousins would wonder why I'd listen to music that you can't dance to so much!"

> "JAMES JAMERSON FASCINATES AND TEACHES ME TO THIS DAY"

Jenifer's transition to bass took place while playing in a band with other teenagers. He became fascinated with the instrument and would try out his bassist's instrument during breaks. Inspired, he set out to convert his own guitar into a bass. "I put all E strings on it! It was weird, but I started feeling the bass more. I thought it was easier, somehow, but it's not! It just felt like me, that it was making itself be me."

The complexity of Jenifer's Bad Brains bass-lines suggests a significant level of musical education – but, as he explains, the reality is more prosaic. "I knew I needed to know theory, but my brain wouldn't absorb it. I tried to start from the very beginning with theory, I'd put charts up on the wall, but it was just like looking at paper! So I don't consider myself a musician for that reason. I'm just a guy with a knack."

He thinks that knack is down to natural aptitude and also the range of bassists whose playing he studied. "Geezer Butler, definitely, but James Jamerson fascinates me and teaches me to this day. He's the only bass player that can't be covered! He's like the grandfather teacher to me, and should be to all bass players. And then there's Larry Graham. A lot of people mistake his thumb playing and they get it all wrong. It's not my favourite style; thumbing is not me, but if I have to thumb, that's who my style is based on."

Stanley Clarke, too, has been a major influence. "I had Sabbath and Zeppelin, then Clarke, Mahavishnu Orchestra, and then punk stuff like 999 and Eater. And then I started making my own styles. Basically I'm Stevie Wonder, Ramones, Return To Forever and Stanley Clarke, all mixed up in one."

Jenifer has a very specific idea of the role a bass should play in a band – not just in hardcore punk, but in any genre. Like the aforementioned Geezer Butler, he's not one for flashy displays of fretboard pyrotechnics. "I played drums, rhythm guitar and grew up in DC, so I have a natural high sense of rhythm. I understand the locomotion of rhythm. When I play bass, I know how to anchor to the music, I know how to support and bring in other musicians. The solidity and definition of one musician in a song can support a bunch of musicians. It's anchoring. There's no vagueness. When you play a bass-line, you have to be playing that line. I've always been a background dude, I've never wanted the spotlight. I give back with weight and definition."

By his own admission, he's a minimalist. "I have a green Modulus Jazz bass. That's the only thing I would have, technically – a graphite neck. The only reason I have one is because it was the most expensive thing in the showcase when our manager was going out to buy me a bass! This is the punk rock in me – I don't want any pedals, I don't want shit. I have a green Modulus, and I love the sound and solidity of the instrument, which is why I've used the same one for 40 years. Other than that, get me an Ampeg SVT, get me a cable, give me some Rotosounds and a Dunlop pick, and that's it. Wherever I go in the world, you roll all that out, then it's on."

That, he says, is the secret to his tone – sheer simplicity. "I would never put a pedal or anything between me and the bass and the amp. What I want to exude is me; the energy that I have in my hands, in my fingers and in my soul, so the equipment is not going to matter. You can give me your fanciest shit and it'll probably hamper me. I'm going to have more fun with the worst shit than with the fanciest. You see what I mean? The fanciest shit is going to be trying to do too much, and the worst shit can't do nothing and I'm gonna squeeze the life out of it."

The Bad Brains have weathered many storms: in recent years their story has been one of battling against the odds, whether it be the ill health of guitarist Doc, or the erratic behaviour of singer HR. The upshot is that there hasn't been a new album since 2012's *Into The Future*, but Darryl hopes that the next record – tentatively titled *Mind Power* – won't be too far off.

"I WOULD NEVER PUT A PEDAL BETWEEN ME AND THE BASS OR THE AMP"

"The thing is, Bad Brains' music is so personal to me. It just kinda happens. I can't really say if the new material will sound like this or that. Likewise, that's why it's hard to pick out my favourite stuff from the past. 'Voyage To Infinity' on the *Quickness* album (1989) is cool. I'll be doing that on the bridge, I've got the first and fifth shit. I like when I feel I can utilise the chords, distinctive picking flows and stuff like that. But I can't really say that the songs that made it to record were necessarily the way I intended them! That teaches you that music isn't always what you intend; that's only part of it. You dig what I'm saying? I'm probably not satisfied with anything – but only because I'm a perfectionist."

badbrains.com

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GODLIKE

The great Nick Beggs returns with a new album from his insightful prog-pop trio, the Mute Gods

Interview: Joel McIver

If you ever get the chance to have a curry with Nick Beggs, iconic bass master since the early Eighties, I suggest you take it. His career has seen him play bass for and with a host of stellar musicians and he's led his own bands too. That's not to mention his fascinating, esoteric worldview.

As the conversation flows, we discuss the fate of humankind, the elaborate prank that is being played on us by the international military-industrial complex and the discovery of alien life – and that's before we get anywhere near the subject of the excellent new album from his band the Mute Gods, not to mention the phenomenal feats he continues to pull off on bass. Read on, and pass the bhajis.

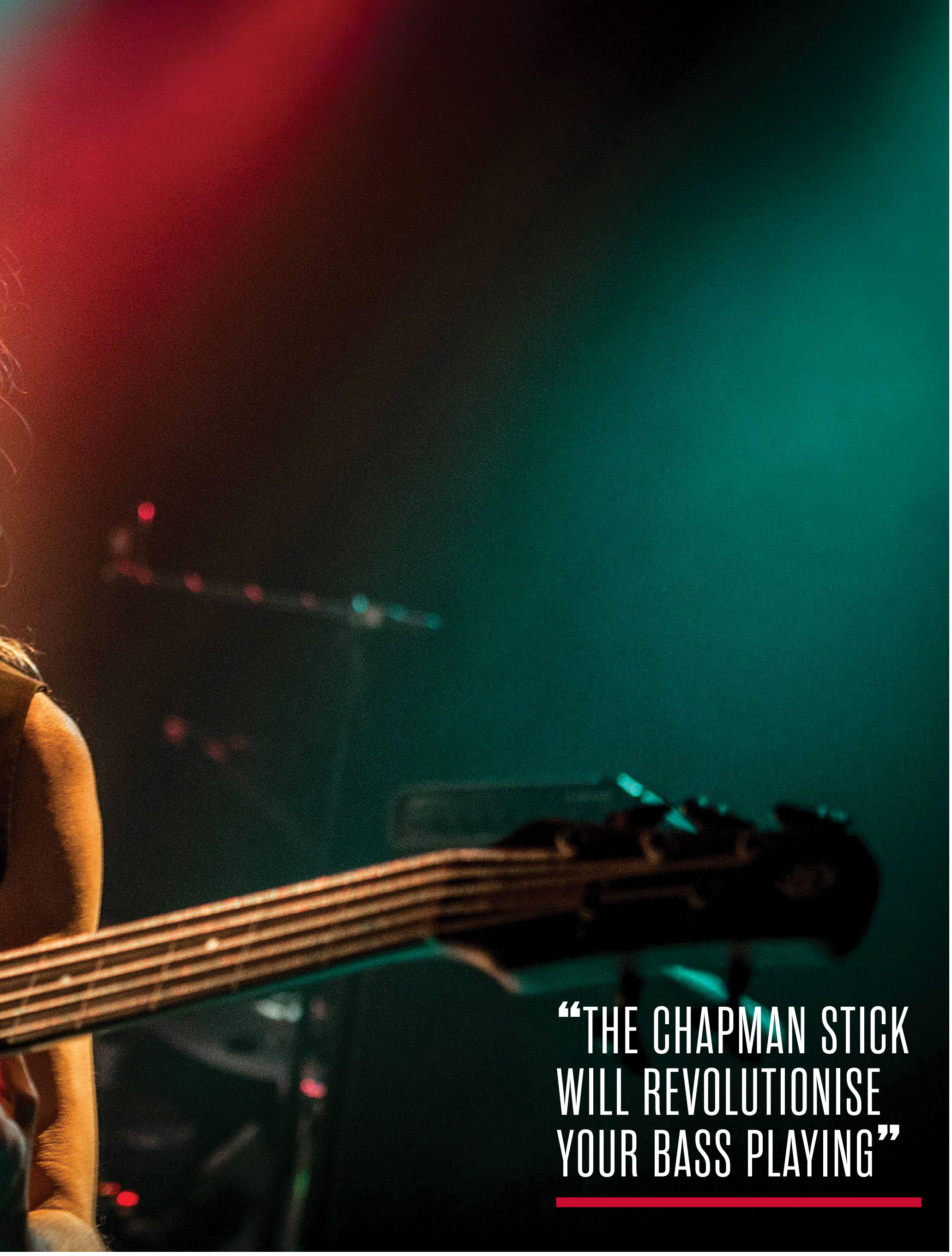
Tell us about your new album, Nick.
It's called *Atheists And Believers*, and is the last of the trilogy which began with *Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me* and then *Tardigrades Will Inherit The Earth*. The name Mute Gods has a quasi-sociopolitical and religious overtone, and the title of the album fits into that theme. The title song was written specifically from the perspective that NASA is already aware that intelligent extraterrestrial life exists. It's a big PR scam on their part, and we're being played massively, on that subject and just about every other one.

Do people ever accuse you of being a nutter when you write about this stuff?
They certainly do, but there's an extraordinary body of evidence from very high-ranking people in the military and government to back this up. But I write about other things as well – love, grief and loss among them. It's my worldview. I made a deal with myself that if I was going to embark on a solo project, it had to be about subjects that I felt passionate about. I wasn't going to be scared of nailing my colours to the mast.

The new album comes after a busy few years for you.
Yes. I did a whole bunch of Genesis Revisited tours, which was a lot of fun. I was with Steve Hackett for 10 years, on and off between stints with Steven Wilson, who I toured with a lot in 2018 on the *To The Bone* album. We did three nights at the Royal Albert Hall, which was lots of fun. Between those gigs I was writing and recording these Mute Gods records. It's been surprising; they've sold reasonably well, and there have been a lot of plaudits. *Prog* magazine have been very supportive, and so have you. I feel very grateful for that after 35 years of doing this, and very lucky too.

What gear are you currently using?
I still use Spector basses, which are extraordinary, and I use TC Electronic amps. I have four- and five-string fretted Spectors and a fretless that they built for me. I use Spector strings on the bass guitars and Chapman's own strings on the Stick, because they're designed for the instruments and they have a lot of upper-mid bite. The instruments themselves have a lot of glassy mids and deep lows, too.

Do you ever play other basses?
No. For me, the Spectors have everything I need. If I want a Music Man or Rickenbacker sound, I can get that, and the instruments are so ergonomically pleasing that the playability is perfect. In practical terms, when you find a bass that really works for you, and a company like Spector who are so welcoming, that's



“THE CHAPMAN STICK WILL REVOLUTIONISE YOUR BASS PLAYING”

a career-defining thing. Add the Stick to that, and I’ve got everything I need.

Many bassists fear the Stick. Should we?
If you have a grounding in any instrument, I challenge you to pick it up, because it will revolutionise whatever you’re doing, as well as expand your vocabulary. If you’re a bass player, you’ll do things on it straight away that will give you another palette. If you’re intimidated by something, that just means you haven’t looked into it yet. Pick it up and play some major and minor scales. Just have some fun with it!

Any effects in the chain?
I use the Roland V-Bass amp-modelling system, because it’s so sturdy, and I’ve been augmenting that with Analog Man stompboxes, which are great. Analog Mike Piera is his name; he’s a cool American hippie who works out of Miami. The effects have that great Haight-Ashbury, Grateful Dead vibe. All his pedals are great. Lee Pomeroy uses them, and I think Tony Levin’s got a few. Check out Analog Man FX.

Governmental mind control aside, things seem to be going well for you.
As an artist, I’m supposed to be angry with the world, and I am – but I’m also very happy in my skin. I’m very happily married and I’ve got a wonderful family, with five children aged 17 to 27. Two of my daughters are getting married to excellent chaps, and I have a granddaughter who is wonderful. These are the important things when you get to my age, 57. These things are the skeleton of life, everything else is the meat on the bones.

Have you made any terrible mistakes over the years?
It depends what you mean by terrible. My worst crime was naivety, as is so

Hajo Müller

often the case with young musicians. I negotiated my way out of problems that had been visited on me by people that I trusted. You never think that your friends will do that to you. And the people who you pay to do their job, take your money and don’t do their job, but do something else with that money instead. The industry is precarious by nature; musicians tend not to have a safety net.

Will you ever write an autobiography?
I’m doing one now. The working title is *Didn’t You Use To Be Nick Beggs?* It’s going to be an almanac of that era, with a side margin of my own angst and adolescence and all the mistakes I made. Not to mention some truly amazing anecdotes from the Eighties...

Share one with us?
Well, I always remember when my band Kajagoogoo were at Nomis Studios in west London, we’d see everybody there: Culture Club, Simple Minds, Spandau Ballet, Level 42, Spear Of Destiny. And Motörhead were there too. I remember that Lemmy walked in and said ‘Oi! Nick! Where’s this Chapman Stick I’ve been hearing about?’ I said ‘Here you go’ and handed it to him. He picked the Stick up and said ‘That’s not rock and roll. Come here! Come here!’ so I followed him into Motörhead’s studio next door, where all these rock chicks were sitting around. He gave me his Rickenbacker, put it on me and handed me a pick. The drummer started playing, with all these frantic double kick drums that sounded like a bomber coming in to land, and I tried to play along, but the neck of this Rickenbacker was like a bow. I swear, it was as much as I could do just to fret a note. I couldn’t play it, and he was standing there laughing at me. I walked out with my tail between my legs. I heard later that Lemmy had a new bass tech who came in, dressed the frets and set up the bass perfectly – and he sacked him!

Atheists And Believers is out on Inside Out Records on March 22. Info: www.themutegods.com, www.nickbeggs.co.uk.

Plug And Play

Jazz and folk maestro Björn Meyer reveals an innovative solution to touring with bass

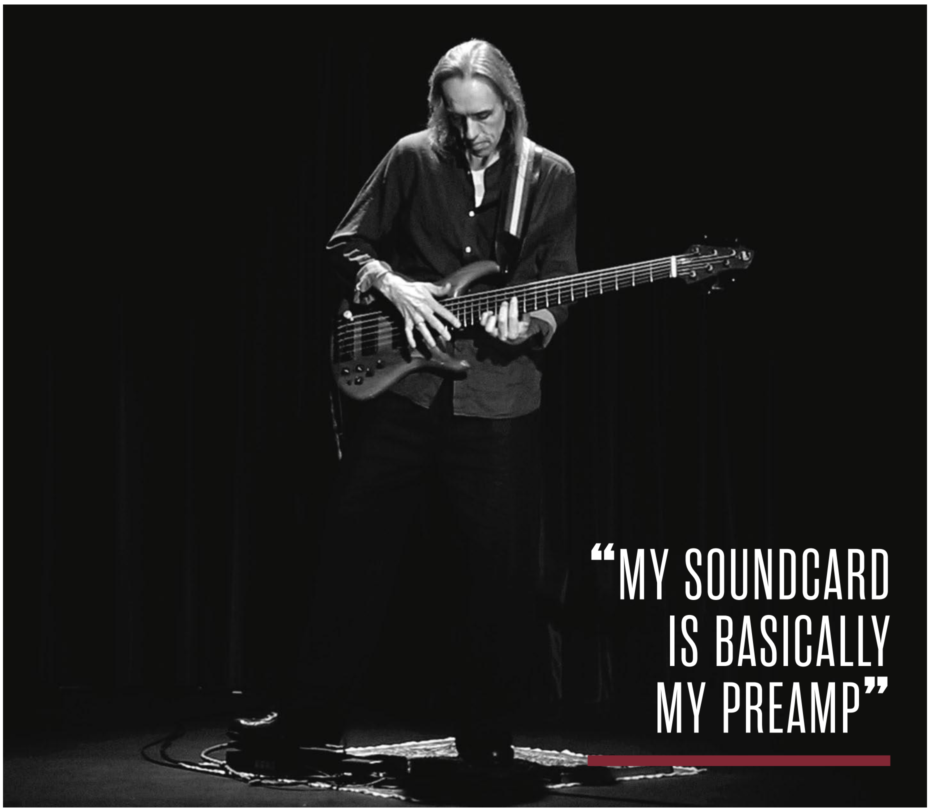
Image: Laura Pleifer, ECM Records

Björn Meyer, born in Sweden and based in Switzerland, has a diverse resumé, having played with Persian harpist-singer Asita Hamidi, Swedish nyckelharpa expert Johan Hedin and Tunisian oud player Anouar Brahem. Meyer was also a long-term member of Nik Bärtsch's Ronin and is a renowned solo artist. His most recent album, *Provenance*, is a far-reaching suite of bass-based experimentation, backed up by an acute awareness of the role of technology.

Asked about his approach to live shows, Meyer tells us: "Normally when I play live, I don't play individual pieces, I play a long set of songs put together, with improvisations in between to go from one piece to another. I prefer this as a listener too, rather than hearing five-minute songs with someone talking between them. For me it feels more like diving into an ambience and staying there for a while."

"My electric bass is an MTD six-string that I've had since 1995, and I also have an acoustic six-string bass tuned from E to high F," he continues. "I play a lot of Swedish folk music, and although the electric bass is great, if you're out in the woods somewhere where the official folk gatherings take place, bringing an amp along somehow spoils the spontaneity. I didn't need the low B in my melodic range. The scale length is the same as an electric and it sounds amazing. There's a pickup and mic built in."

Meyer also plays a mandola, which he defines as "an alto version of a mandolin, although my bass version has a deeper range; it has special reinforcements to the top to take care of the lower frequencies. I tune it D, G, D, A, D, a little like an Irish bouzouki or a Greek instrument. When I travel, I use a soundcard, a Metric Halo Neo 2882, which is basically my preamp, although technically it's a computer interface. It has built-in signal processing, EQs and compressors, so travelling with a single bass is made a little bit easier.



"MY SOUNDCARD IS BASICALLY MY PREAMP"

Sometimes I have the acoustic bass guitar and bass mandola with me as well, so it's useful for the different instruments. I use the soundcard as a preamp hub and then I use the computer to run effects. From there I have self-built MIDI expression pedals to control the effects that are on the computer. Basically the interface does everything that has to be done – levels, compression, EQ – and the signal goes to the computer, where effects are added.

"This is my travel solution, and it has immense possibilities – especially with the acoustic instruments – but I do use bass amps too," he adds. "As I see it, the EQs are so much more precise and workable on the soundcard than the graphic equalisers are on most bass amps. Yes, the amp EQ faders will address certain frequencies, but those frequencies might not suit the particular room I'm playing in, for instance. I can be much more exact this way."

All that being said, Meyer enjoys the old-fashioned solution too. He tells us: "Touring with Ronin and plugging the bass into an amp with a cable was quite nice! I like stompboxes as well, but I needed a practical solution for travelling, especially when it came to resonance issues and feedback problems. I also like being totally independent of the venue's gear. I have everything in my backpack, because the MIDI controllers that I use only weigh a few hundred grammes each."

And if the technology lets him down? "If the computer explodes or something, my sound is still there, because the soundcard is like a digital preamp. Luckily the computer has never crashed, but of course I know that these things happen because I come from a computer background, and I like to be as independent from technical issues as possible. Fingers crossed!"

Provenance is out now on ECM. Info: www.bjornmeyer.com

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Gene Genie

Sonia 'Anubis' Nusselder of Sepiroth, Burning Witches and Ursinne puts the pedal to the metal

Interview: Joel McIver

When I was 14 years old I was obsessed with Gene Simmons of Kiss, who looked incredibly badass – a jumping, fire-spewing demon with a monstrous outfit. He was absolutely mind-blowing. I used to watch his live videos for hours, inspecting every single stage move and finger movement. Gene's bass playing made a huge impression on me and inspired me to pick up the bass. I really wanted to be as cool as him onstage, feel the same way as he does on stage, and to release the inner beast, just as he does when he plays in front of those huge crowds.

In 2012, I picked up a bass and took lessons at a local music school, where I discovered a passion for Jaco Pastorius. My music taste expanded exponentially and I developed an appreciation for everything from obscure death metal to mystical jazz fusion. Aged 15, I joined a thrash metal band named Deamension, and then played live with death metal bands Ecocide and Shade Of Hatred.

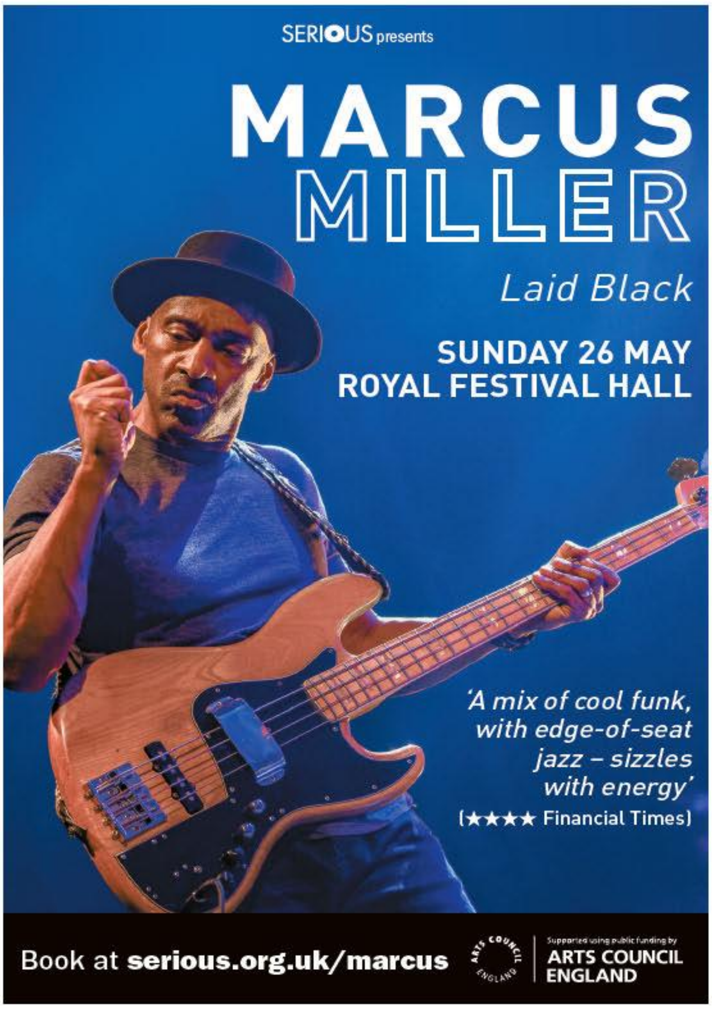
I currently play in a Swiss power metal band, Burning Witches, and a Dutch death metal band, Sepiroth, as guitarist and bassist. Sepiroth are currently recording a new album, which is coming out in 2019, and Burning Witches have just released the *Hexenhammer* album on Nuclear Blast.

I'm endorsed by EMG pickups and Harvest Bass Bags and I always play five-string basses; I need the extra low B to have a lower range for Sepiroth. I really enjoy slapping the bass, too. I don't do it in my bands, but I love playing along funky tunes when I am jamming at home. I love feeling what you play, deep down: that moment when you visualise your bass-lines in your head and become one with the instrument. When you don't need to think about the notes, and feel them from head to toe, that's when you're really playing the bass correctly.

My favourite bass ever to date is an ESP LTD F-105 named Spirit Crusher. It's the most comfortable bass to play because of how light it is and how thin the headstock is. I think the coolest-looking basses are the BC Rich Ironbird and Widow, as well as the custom Charlie LoBue bass built for Gene Simmons back in the 70s.

Wherever and whenever you play, never forget to spread your bass-lines and funk up your surroundings. We bass players can be underrated sometimes, so don't be afraid to show people who brings the groove to Planet Earth.

www.facebook.com/soniaanubisnusselder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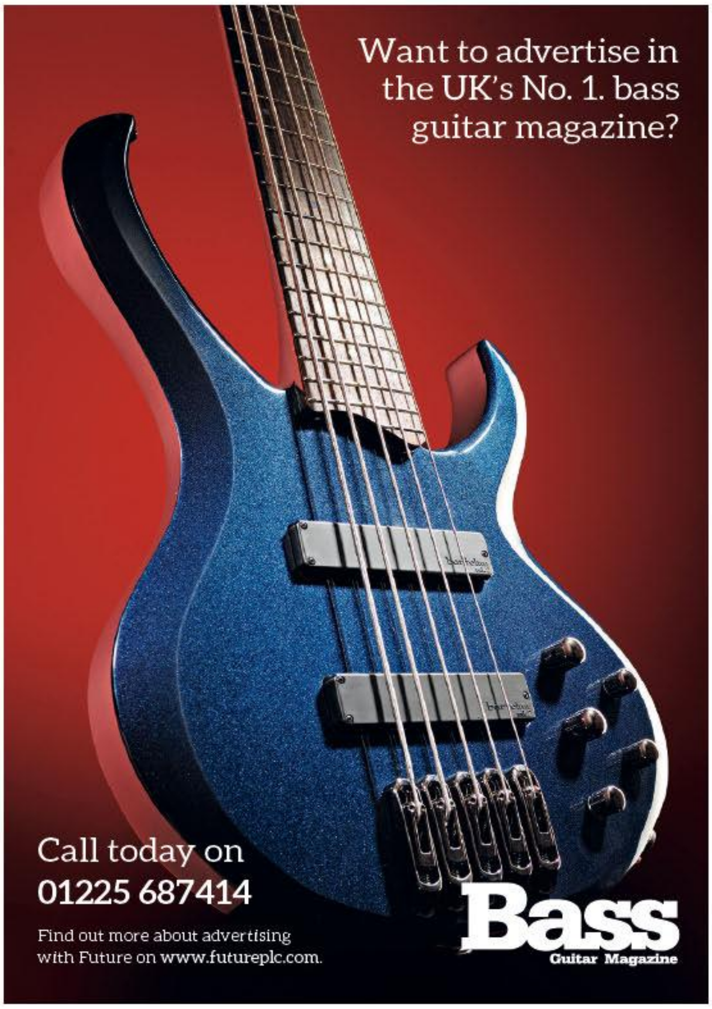
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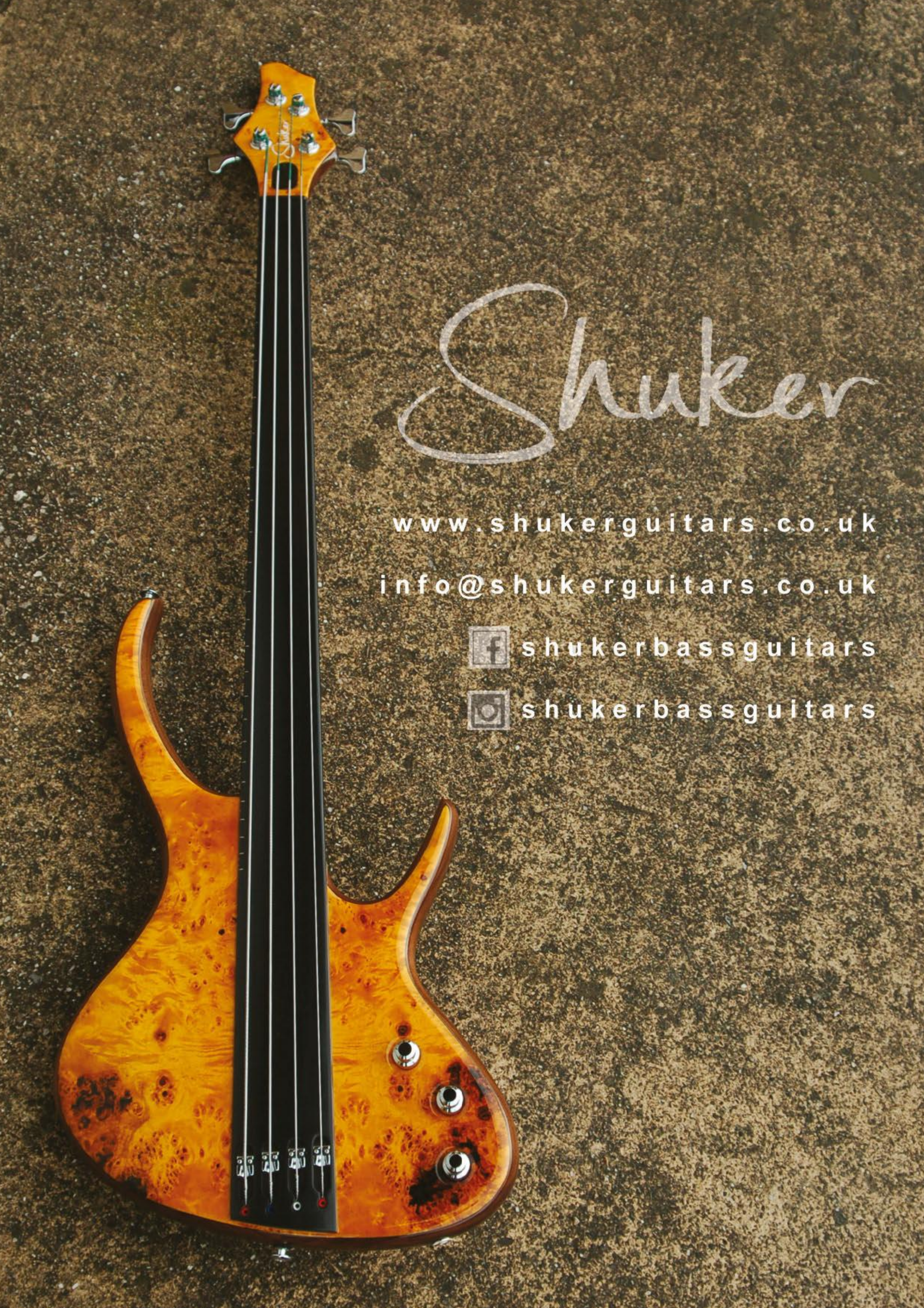
The revenge of all those trees that fell in the forest but were never heard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GEAR REVIEWS

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass cabs and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's useful for bassists, but generally speaking, this zone is reserved for bass-specific gear.

We take our reviews seriously. *BGM* is the only print magazine devoted to bass in this country, and we have readers all over the world, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your time, we'll say so; if it's flawed, we'll make that clear. We're not beholden to advertisers in any way, and our tests are independent of the views of manufacturers and distributors.

When you read about a product here, you're getting a balanced review from an experienced bass tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality.

Right, that's enough from me, and remember, this is just about the only place that it's good to have GAS!*

Joel McIver, editor

*GAS = Gear Acquisition Syndrome (a malaise often suffered by bass players)

£2349 | 50
RICKENBACKER 4003

£3499 | 52
SADOWSKY SATIN SERIES DELUXE 4-21

£999 | 54
DANELECTRO 64

£2999 | 56
YAMAHA NATHAN EAST SIGNATURE BBNEII

£230 | 58
ELECTRO-HARMONIX MOD REX POLYRHYTHMIC MODULATOR

RICKENBACKER 4003

Idiosyncratic but with many admirers, the stalwart Ricky maintains an ever-popular presence. Mike Brooks investigates

The Great British Bass Lounge
www.greatbritishbasslounge.com

Rosetti
www.rosetti.co.uk

£2349

If there was ever a bass version of Marmite, the Rickenbacker is surely it. Although the brand has thousands of fans, there are equally many bassaholics who simply can't warm to these basses' features or tones. What is unarguable, however, is the number of bass legends that have used one to great effect: Chris Squire, Cliff Burton, Lemmy, Paul McCartney, Geddy Lee and Roger Glover among them. The list really does go on and on! This particular bass isn't a new model, but as an example of the current quality coming out of the Rickenbacker factory, we couldn't wait to get our hands on it.

Build Quality

The 4003 is an iconic bass in visual terms – and this example in Midnight Blue is no exception. The deep, rich colouring sits very well alongside the white scratchplate, truss rod cover and white outer edge binding. The almost orange hue of the 20-fret gloss-coated rosewood fingerboard adds a natural element to the visuals, while the sharktooth mother-of-pearl position inlays add a vintage vibe.

The bass's body dimensions are broad but slim, and although the instrument is a little weighty, it has a substantial feel. However, certain elements seem a little fragile, particularly in the hardware department, although this is a minor concern. Having said that, this is a design that has stood the test of time; despite some of its idiosyncrasies, the 4003's components and construction should be up to handling some force, from even the most heavy-handed of players.

All 20 frets are easily accessible, but the rear pickup cover prevents you from playing over the pickup, forcing you to anchor your picking hand behind the pickup or in front of it, closer to the neck. The control set is simple enough, with a volume and tone control for each pickup, a three-position pickup selector and a treble boost courtesy of a push/pull facility on the treble pickup tone control. The elephant-ear machine heads function smoothly and black dot position markers can easily be seen along the white neck binding.

The neck profile is of a slim C shape, while the fingerboard remains consistently broad across its whole length. The 19mm string spacing suits the bass and makes navigating the frets relatively easy.

Sounds And Playability

Surprisingly, I found the bass to be particularly resonant – its distinctive clank was present even before I plugged in. Once

I was playing through a cab that clank came to the fore. The meaty, powerful Rickenbacker tone was authoritative, and that familiar hollow sound was easily called upon.

Each pickup has its own, markedly different sound. As you would expect, the neck pickup is significantly more rounded than the rear unit, and does its best to offer a full, ballsy tone that can be suitably coloured with the tone control. The rear pickup takes up a lot of space but it sits in the sweet spot; playing the strings to either side of it gives you a choice of tones. The tone control is your friend when taming the ever-present metallic grind of the strings on the frets; call upon the treble boost option and a noticeable definition appears, which is particularly useful if you're playing with a pick. It also adds some presence if you're a fingerstyle player.

Some players, particularly tech-heads who like an array of active tone options, will find that the 4003 fails to cater to their preferences. Conversely, the bass's look, sound and playability will be nirvana for certain other players. The playability is good but not perfect, although this particular example is blessed with a comfortable medium action, a good setup and no sharp frets. There is significant headstock bias; even when placed on a strap, the head wants to venture downwards – but if you keep it in an angled playing position, you should be fine.

Conclusion

This is an understated bass in a cool, classic way, and much of its history and mystique is still in place. The sounds are familiar and although it's not suited to all musical genres or playing styles, the 4003 remains a classic. The price is hefty, of course, but nothing sounds quite like a Rickenbacker bass.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £2349
Made In | USA
Colour | Midnight blue, gloss finish
Body | Maple
Neck | Maple, 33.25" scale
Neck Joint | Through-neck
Nut Width | 43mm / 1.7"
Fingerboard | Rosewood
Frets | 20
Pickups | Standard Rickenbacker single-coil pickups x 2
Electronics | Passive
Controls | Volume x 2, tone x 2, three position switch
Hardware | Chrome hardware, Rickenbacker bridge and machine heads
Weight | 3.9kg / 8.6 lb
Case/gig bag included | Hardcase
Left-hand option available | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Iconic looks and tones that have stood the test of time
Minus | Not cheap
Overall | If the sounds tickle your fancy, the pricetag is irrelevant

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■■■■□□
SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■■■□□□
VALUE	■■■■■■■□□□

SADOWSKY
Satin Series Deluxe 4-21

If you like your Sadowsky bass to feel like silk, look no further, says Mike Brooks

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

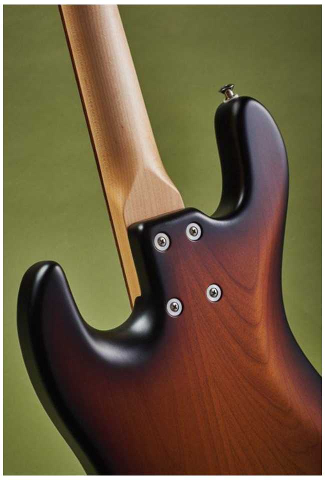
£3499

The new Satin Series of instruments coming out of Roger Sadowsky's New York workshop are turning heads – and with good reason. For those who prefer a satin finish on their instruments they're an obvious winner. Featuring the finest luthiery and understated but stunning looks, these basses feel positively indulgent. At a snip under £3500, this one doesn't come cheap. Does it justify its price? Allow us to investigate…

Build Quality

The familiar Jazz shape and styling are clearly on display, although the elegantly curved Sadowsky headstock offers some refinement. The '59 Burst satin finish is a great choice of colouring alongside the 4A flame figuring of the maple top timber. There's effective contouring front and back, while the white three-ply scratchplate and chrome control plate lend an old-school aura to what is very much a 2019 instrument. The lower cutaway is extensive, while the body dimensions offer a degree of comfort and stability in terms of size. The chambered swamp ash body-core naturally aids overall balance.

The 21-fret pau ferro fingerboard fits in nicely with the warm colouring of the body, while the chrome hardware, consisting of a Sadowsky high-mass bridge, Hipshot Ultralite machine heads and five-control setup, work visually without drawing too much attention away from the overall aesthetic. The hardware is high quality; the machine heads turn smoothly and offer stable tuning, while the Dunlop straplocks fulfil their role reliably. Both the fingerboard and the side of the neck feature white dot position markers. The neck also incorporates graphite strips to aid stability.



The neck profile offers much to the overall playability with its slim, rounded C-shaped profile, and the four-bolt attachment is tight and solid. The fretwork is immaculate with no sharp fret ends whatsoever and an action that simply demands to be played.

Sounds And Playability

The Satin Series is aimed at the working bassist, so none of the components have been compromised to fit into a budget. £3499 is a hefty wad of cash, but this instrument has much to impress. The acoustic tone is smooth and solid with an impressive sustain, and the chambered body allows the bass to 'breathe'. Balance is impressive; there's little headstock bias and the bass hangs effortlessly on a strap.

Armed with a pair of hum-cancelling single-coil pickups with 60s winding, and a stacked-control two-band Sadowsky circuit, this bass covers a lot of tonal ground. The signal is strong and clear and with no EQ boosted, the natural tone is full from both pickups. The bass and treble controls are boost-only, so adding EQ a little at a time is probably the best way to go. Without the extra EQ, there is already plenty of spring and bounce. Panning between each pickup yields distinctive results, with plenty of pleasing tones on offer.

Adding some bass and treble opens up the palette, and slap and tap fans will no doubt love the tones achievable with the treble control. With a little experimentation, this bass is capable of quite an array of tones, from a full, ballsy sound to delicate, crisp finesse and detail across the whole register. All of this is before we even mention the Vintage Tone Control, which is accessed by a push/pull facility and offers further tonal options for players who prefer some passive colour.

In terms of playability, I'm hard pressed to find any negatives. The 20mm (0.79") string spacing and comfortable neck dimensions add up to an effortless playing experience. At 3.2kg (seven pounds) many a player will be keen to test one of these – and they may be surprised to find just how comfortable it is, although bear in mind that this particular deluxe example features chambered swamp ash and therefore a weight reduction compared to standard models.

Conclusion

The Satin Series will no doubt prove popular; it's a fine instrument, and offers great sounds and a versatility backed up with the looks, comfort and playability for which Sadowsky basses have become renowned. All this comes at a significant cost, but if you take into consideration the volatility of the money markets and the poor current state of the pound, it starts to look more appealing. Prepare to be impressed… we were.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £3499
Made In | USA
Colour | 59 Burst, satin finish
Body | Chambered swamp ash with 4A flame maple top
Neck | One-piece maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 38mm / 1.5"
Fingerboard | Pau ferro
Frets | 21
Pickups | Sadowsky hum-cancelling single-coil pickups x 2
Electronics | Active 9-volt, Sadowsky 2 band EQ
Controls | Volume, reverse pickup pan, vintage tone control (VTC) with push/pull bypass switch, stacked bass/treble
Hardware | Chrome hardware, Sadowsky high mass quick release bridge, Hipshot Ultralite machine heads
Weight | 3.2 kg / 7 lb
Case/gig bag included | Sadowsky softcase
Left-hand option available | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Everything you would expect from a Sadowsky – but in a refined satin finish
Minus | The pricetag
Overall | A high quality bass with a high quality pedigree

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

DANELECTRO 64

When I'm 64... will I still be playing vintage bass sounds, ponders Joel McIver

JHS
www.jhs.co.uk

£999

Resolutely retro in looks and passive in nature, this knowingly-named Danelectro bass looks both unnervingly unorthodox and old-fashioned at the same time. You won't see it played in a funk or metal band, that's for sure, but it would definitely be at home in a country or soul outfit. Or are we just being shallow?

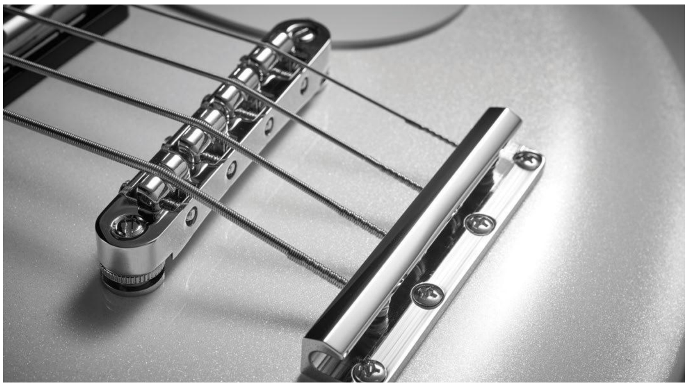
Build Quality

With its 'reversed double cutaway offset horn shape' (say that a few times in a row after a bottle of merlot) and those nutty pickup angles, the Danelectro 64 looks as if it's melted slightly, like one of Dali's clocks. Pick it up, though, and it's solid despite being relatively lightweight; refreshingly, there's little to no headstock dive because of that tiny headstock and the weeny tuners. (You probably think we're obsessed with bass balance here, and you'd be right, but that's what a couple of decades of gigging does to you... and your lower back.)

All the right engineering seems to have gone into this bass, as frankly it should be at this price. The features are traditional but well-made and assembled, from the four-bolt bolt-on neck join, the two-piece bridge and the stubbornly un-modern front jack socket. The finish of the body is lustrous in the extreme, with a touch of glitter sparkling away under the White Pearl finish, and unusually the same (or similar) finish texture has been applied to the back of the neck.

Sounds And Playability

We've got two pickups, a single tone, a three-position selector and a coil tap available to us, and not a whiff of active electronics to be had – which makes sense, given the sounds and vibe being projected here. You'd be slightly unhinged to expect cracking treble



tones out of the 64, and indeed there are very few, with the focus firmly on the low end. Solo the bridge unit, flatten or roll off the tone and pluck away to your heart's content – it's Motown, soul and even reggae sounds all the way.

That said, all bass and no mids makes Jack a dull boy, to paraphrase – and of course, with this bass coming from 1964 as it were, there are mids at hand. Just not high ones. What you can achieve with a bit of effort and a lot of rolling-on of tone is a Carol Kaye-style click, which adds some leading-edge definition to the notes and a touch of cut. It's still not what you'd call a mids-heavy range, so don't expect much clarity. Instead, enjoy the deep, warm sounds and make sure you mute a lot with either hand.

In terms of playability, you'll need to adjust the thumb rest point a bit thanks to the pickup angle, or just do what they did back then and rest your thumb on the E string. The rear neck finish is pretty sticky, but it's not like you were planning to sweep-pick sixteenths at 300bpm on this bass anyway. Or were you? If so, consider looking elsewhere.

Conclusion

The Danelectro 64 does one job extremely well indeed. I could sit here all day, doing poor Jamerson and Kaye impressions, thanks to the warm, rich sounds the 64 creates so well. If you're asked to play anything else, bring a different bass – and be warned; this instrument isn't cheap, especially given its 'selective' tone range. We still love it, though.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £999
Made In | Korea
Body | Cyprus
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck join | Bolt-on, four bolts
Fretboard | Rosewood, 20 frets
Pickups | Dual humbucking 'lipstick' bridge pickup, vintage-style single-coil neck pickup
Controls | Master volume, tone (push-pull to split bridge pickup), three-way pickup switch
Hardware | Adjustable bridge with individual saddles
Weight | 3.6 kg / 8 lbs
Left-hand available | No
Gigbag/case included | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Vintage tones done very well indeed
Minus | Other tones not done at all, and it's expensive
Overall | Amazing retro tones, available at a price

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

YAMAHA

Nathan East Signature BBNEII

This appropriately cool bass for music's Mr Cool promises much... but does it deliver? Mike Brooks finds out

Bass Direct
www.bassdirect.co.uk

£2999

Although this isn't a new bass model as such, what we have here is the latest iteration of Nathan East's signature Yamaha – and with Mr East still trailblazing around the globe with his basses in tow, he's obviously very happy with them. Nathan's association with Yamaha goes back around 40 years, and this model is the summation of all the Yamaha instruments that have passed through his hands. So what does one of the busiest sidemen on the planet require from a bass? Let's put his signature model under the microscope and take a look.

Build Quality

A gloss white finish and matching headstock, paired with gold hardware? The sleek image of this bass will rub a few players up the wrong way – but it's a classic look. The body shape doesn't break away from the norm too much, but there is a deep lower cutaway offering great access to the 24 frets. The sculpting and contouring to the rear provide a comfortable dip around the stomach area before sculpting outwards, thus reducing the overall body depth. As a through-neck bass, the continuity is quite linear, although the neck-to-body join isn't especially shallow.

There is some headstock bias, and this isn't the lightest instrument around, but at least it feels appropriately substantial. The dark ebony fingerboard comes fitted with abalone block position markers and a custom marker at the 12th fret, while the side of the neck sports white dot markers. The neck profile is full, but it's not a struggle to get your fretting hand around it. Although the fingerboard is broad, the fine setup, comfortable action and standard 19mm string spacing make this a very enjoyable bass to play.

The hardware is high quality, as you would expect. Individual Yamaha monorail bridge saddles improve sustain and maintain tuning stability, while the gold machine heads come equipped with mother-of-pearl tuners – a classy touch. Truss-rod access comes via a deep recess at the neck/body join, and a recessed jack socket can be found on the side of the body below the strap button.

Sounds And Playability

Bearing the signature of a player with technique and taste, you would expect the BBNEII to offer a wide palette of sounds… and it does. Its weight and dimensions mean that every nuance and string vibration is conveyed through the body. Hold it against you as you play and you will feel it, I assure you. Sustain is excellent and the overall resonance is impressive.

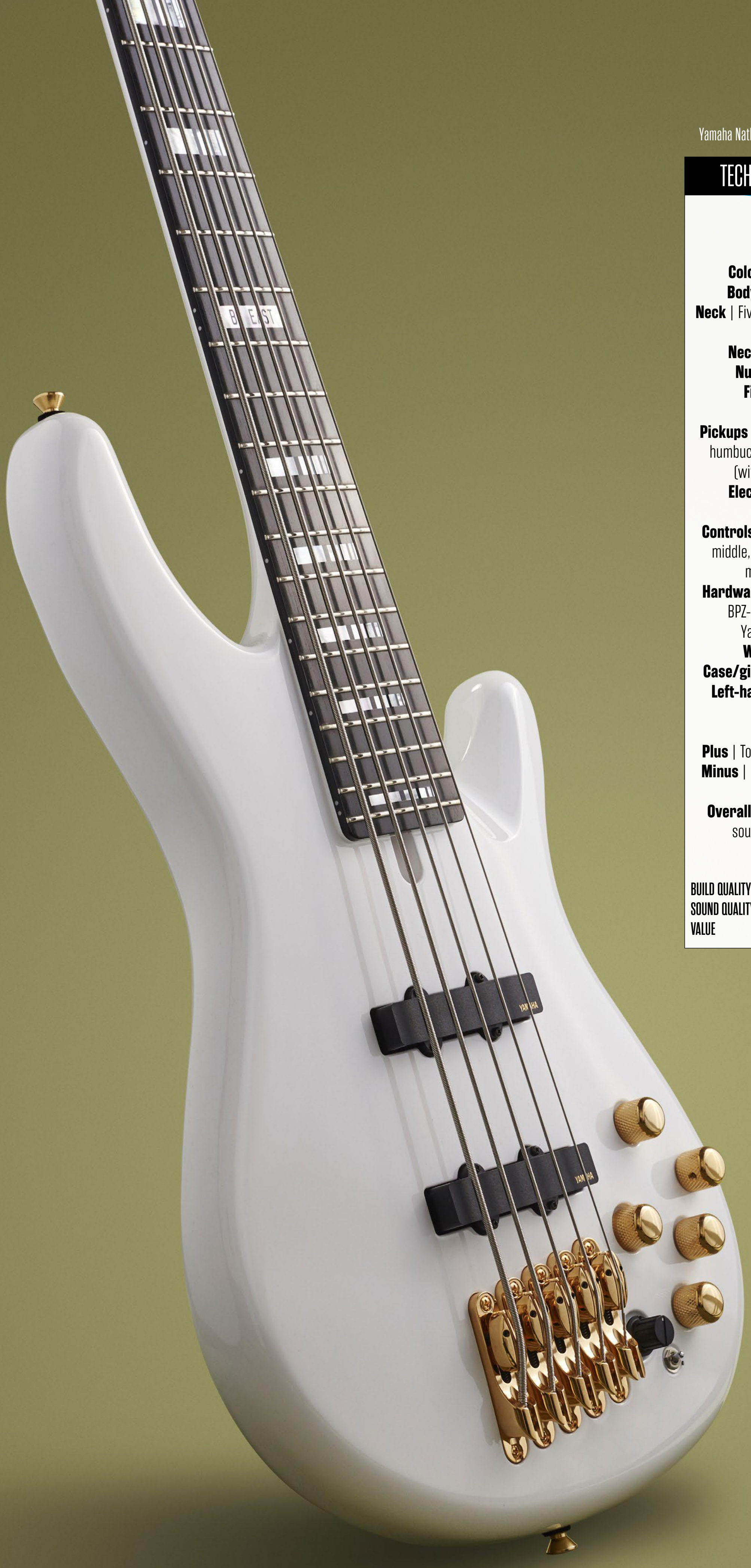
With the EQ set flat, the bass has a naturally woody fundamental, no doubt aided by its alder, maple and mahogany timbers. Panning between the pickups reveals a good selection of usable tones. The ebony fingerboard certainly contributes to the hard tone that seems to run through anything you play, but the EQ is flexible enough to add some light and shade. The mid-cut switch and mid-frequency selector are certainly a useful addition, should you require a 'song' sound and a pushed, upfront bass tone for extra projection.

With both boost and cut on offer, the EQ is impressively voiced with a powerful bottom end, strong mids and a tight, crisp treble response. Fingerstyle players will enjoy the versatility of the EQ, while rock fans will dig the hefty tone that can be coaxed from this beast, dressed though it is in the crispest of suits. On the downside, the low B string is a little flappy; given the 34" scale, I was hoping for a slightly tighter response so that the lower register notes would stand out and have some defined character. But if it works for the mighty East…

This bass can be heard on a million albums and YouTube clips, so evidence of its performance capabilities is easily obtained. One thing's for sure, it's adept at covering many musical requirements. I doubt many bassists would feel disappointed with it.

Conclusion

This is a bass that offers a lot for its upmarket price. It oozes class and has tones for virtually any musical setting. In terms of playability, Yamaha have drawn on East's years of playing experience to deliver a splendid instrument. A new six-string headless signature version has just been unveiled at NAMM, so we look forward to seeing that model. For now, the BBNEII remains a serious force of its own.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £2999
Made In | Japan
Colour | White, gloss finish
Body | Alder with maple top
Neck | Five-piece maple and mahogany, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Through neck
Nut Width | 43mm / 1.7"
Fingerboard | Ebony
Frets | 24
Pickups | Yamaha Alnico V stack-type humbucking single-coil pickups x 2 (with hum-cancelling coil)
Electronics | Active 9-volt, Yamaha 3 band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, bass, middle, treble, mid-cut frequency, mid-cut on/off switch
Hardware | Gold hardware, Yamaha BPZ-7 monorail bridge units, Yamaha machine heads
Weight | 4.2kg / 9.3lb
Case/gig bag included | Hardcase
Left-hand option available | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Tones, playability, bags of style
Minus | Hefty in the weight and price departments
Overall | A fine bass with powerful sounds. Seek and audition!

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

ELECTRO-HARMONIX
Mod Rex Polyrhythmic Modulator

Who better to provide a thorough review of this eldritch new EHX box than uncanny effects warlock Steve Lawson?

Electro-Harmonix
www.ehx.com

£230

Electro-Harmonix have long been a brand solidly associated with classic bass sounds. From the Big Muff and Bass Balls for overdrive to the Small Stone and its bass-specific cousin the Bass Clone chorus pedals, EHX have been supplying low end magic for decades. But alongside those 'one classic sound' pedals, they've also regularly dipped into the world of complex pedals that allow for a huge degree of variation and manipulation.

Enter the Mod Rex, a four-stage Modulation pedal, allowing for independent modulation, tremolo, panning and filtering, all clocked to the same tempo – internal or external – and controllable in a dizzying number of ways. It boasts a level of control more readily associated with rackmount studio gear, all housed in a standard double-width stomp box. So does it deliver? Let's find out!

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £230
Made In | USA
Features | Full stereo input and output; Mod section (vibrato, flanger, chorus, phaser), Trem section (tremolo effects with depth control), Pan section (animated panning effects), Filter section (modulate filter with selectable low pass, high pass and band pass modes), nine selectable time divisions for each section, save and recall up to 100 presets, Control tempo via knob, footswitch, external switch or expression pedal, or MIDI clock
Dimensions | H 2.25" x W 4.75" x D 4" / H 57 mm x W 121 mm x D 102 mm
Weight | 885g

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A well thought-out solution to MIDI triggering
Minus | A little complicated for some players
Overall | Great ideas in one package – and a great bass in its own right

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY	■■■■■■■■■■
SOUND QUALITY	■■■■■■■■■□
VALUE	■■■■■■■■■□

Straight out of the box, it's clear that the pedal layout has players in mind. Even before we dig into the manual (an absolute must with a pedal this complex), we can see that the four sections are clearly labelled. It takes seconds to work out how to vary the depth of each effect, tap the tempo, control the volume, and start to think about what 'division' might mean… We also notice that every knob apart from the volume is also clickable, offering maximum control without adding even more buttons.

The division knob on each of the four sections is where the rhythmic magic of the pedal comes in. While every effect is clocked to the same master tempo, the exact subdivision that's set for each effect is independent. This makes for some amazing sonic possibilities: set everything the same and you can have your bass sound pulsating and panning in lock step, producing some striking electronic sounds in exact tempo with all the other elements in the track. If your tastes are a little more subtle, adding a gentle pan and tremolo to your

chorus and flange sounds just injects a little stereo width to your sound when recording chords or melodic lines. In fact, such is the beauty of these possibilities, this pedal will have you considering a stereo live rig before too long!

Let's take a closer look at each of the four sections. Under 'MOD' you get to choose between vibrato, flanger, chorus and phaser, and can then control depth and feedback, where two other buttons are offered. The first is 'R. Inv' – a button that inverts the LFO on the right channel, basically making a mono signal from an instrument into a stereo one. The pedal is set up for a true stereo signal path, but little touches like this make it versatile by supporting a wide range of possible pedal board options. The second button is 'Shape'; with this held down you can then choose the shape of the LFO using the selector under the main numerical display. This gives a massive amount of musical control over each of the effects, and the more extreme the effect depth and feedback, the more noticeable the shape of the LFO will be. On sounds that pulsate, changing the wave shape completely changes the rhythmic effect, making it possible to create entire beats from combinations of LFO shapes and rhythmic subdivisions – all of which can be independently set for each of the four sections.

The possibilities here are huge, and after just a few minutes with the manual it's relatively simple to dial in the most bizarre and wonderful techno sounds and rhythmic patterns. The Tremolo and Pan sections each have a control for division and depth and a button to change the wave shape. Turn the depth up on either and you can get wildly oscillating sounds that don't even vaguely resemble a bass. The Filter section is like an autowah on angel dust: choose between low pass, high pass and band pass (just like on the Q-Tron), adjust the depth and resonance, and then control the shape of the LFO. That makes for a huge range of possible tempo-

clocked filter effects. For anyone working in EDM, dubstep or future funk, this filter is a godsend.

And indeed, the tempo sync is one of the most significant features here. There are three ways to set the master tempo in the Mod Rex: the first is tap tempo with the footswitch. Easy enough. The second is from an external pulse clock: if you've got any of the other EHX pedals that have a clock out, you can hook straight into those. The third is via MIDI. Aside from its ability to turbocharge the tempo-mapping possibilities, MIDI control is without doubt one of the deepest aspects of this pedal. Every parameter that can be accessed via the knobs and buttons on the box can also be controlled, and therefore automated live or in the studio, by MIDI. The CC values for each parameter are fixed (there's no sensible way to do a MIDI learn without a proper screen), but it will operate on any MIDI channel, so will easily slot into any MIDI powered rig, or allow on bigger tours for off-stage or front-of-house control, should you need that.

But how does it sound? That's what really matters. All that control means nothing if you're just getting a multitude of mediocre tones. Thankfully, the Mod Rex sounds amazing. At the more extreme ends of the settings, there's a fair amount of noise generated, so it definitely favours a generous level coming in so that you can turn down the master volume and keep the noise floor at acceptable levels, but it definitely requires careful gain staging within your system. But beyond that, it's truly magical. It really does offer a level of control rarely seen in pedal format, and a massive range of possible tones.

Thankfully, it also has 100 preset slots that you can save and recall either from the top, via TRS-wired footswitch or MIDI, and there are 20 presets preloaded to get you started. But you'll soon be making your own sounds and building an arsenal of signature effects to take with you into any creative situation. If you're just looking for a chorus or flanger, it's massive overkill, but if control is what you're craving, the Mod Rex is pretty near perfect.

BASS TUITION

Making you a better bass player

Welcome to our tuition section, in which *Bass Guitar Magazine* collates the wit and wisdom of the *crème de la crème* of the electric and upright bass world. We're fortunate enough to have some serious talent on the team, from world-class music educators to experienced touring musicians, who between them have laid down the low notes in every studio, club and arena in the civilised world. Note that we've divided the columns according to Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level for easy reference. Whether you're looking to improve your playing technique, expand your awareness of theory, set up your rig to sound like your particular bass hero or simply get on a bus and tour, we provide the answers you need here. What are you waiting for? Dive in... **Joel McIver, editor**

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here!
Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across nearly two decades of touring, and a huge catalogue of solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for over two decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?
www.stevelawson.net

STEVE LAWSON

Beginners 66

Now you're rolling with theory and techniques, it's time to hit the next level
Philip Mann studied at the London College of Music, securing bachelor's and master's degrees in performance before receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. Endorsed by Overwater and Vanderkley, he's now a busy international freelancing electric and double bassist. His performance and session credits include work with double Grammy Award-winning guitarist Albert Lee, five-time Grammy Award nominee Hunter Hayes, Deep Purple's Steve Morse, Billy Bragg and country artist Peter Donegan. He has featured as a solo demonstration artist at the London Bass Guitar Show every year since 2012 and is currently a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School while also lecturing for Scott's Bass Lessons.

PHIL MANN

Intermediate 72

Take the bass world by storm with the ultimate tuition section
Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in function bands, cruise ship gigs, theatre shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and has worked for *BGM* since its first issue. Since 2007 Stuart has worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he continues to teach all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for bassists such as Mark King, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm, Bernard Edwards, Stuart Zender and John Entwistle, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

STUART CLAYTON

Advanced 76

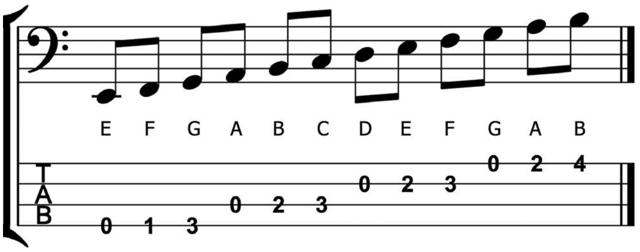
BGM Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in *Bass Guitar Magazine*

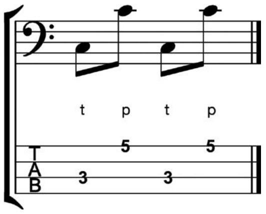
The Stave: most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.

Tablature: this is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.

Notes shown in brackets indicate that a note has been tied over from a previous bar.

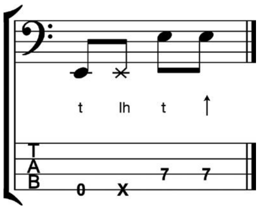


PLAYING TECHNIQUES



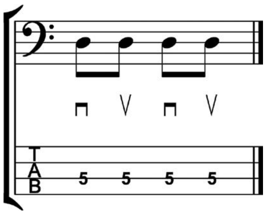
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'



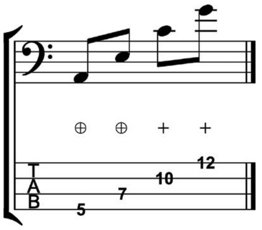
ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow



PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

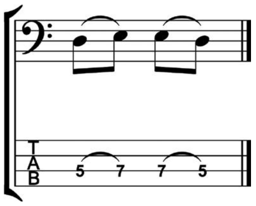
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up)



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

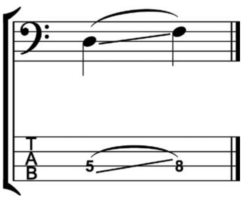
Fretting hand taps are shown with a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are just '+'. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

FRETTING TECHNIQUES



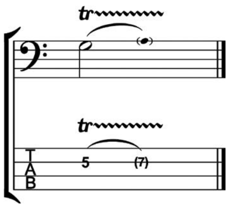
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand



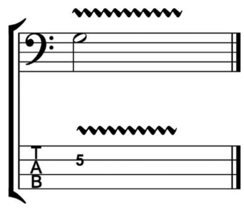
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

Slides are performed by playing the first note then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note



TRILLS

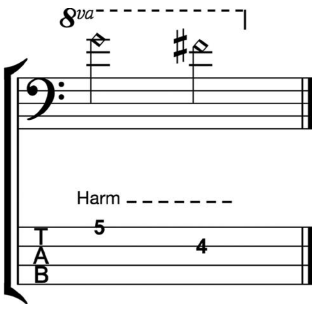
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown using hammer-ons and pull-offs



VIBRATO

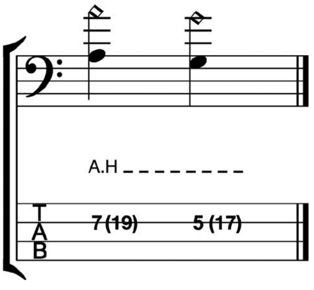
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger

PLAYING HARMONICS



NATURAL HARMONICS

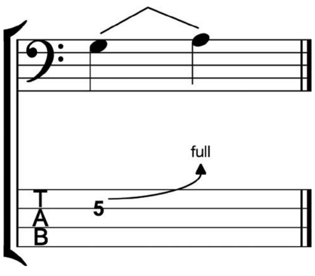
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

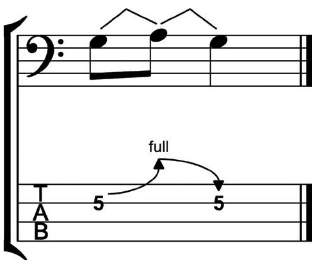
Pluck the string while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand's thumb to the note in brackets

BENDING NOTES



BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ = semitone, full = tone



BEND AND RELEASE

The note is bent up to the interval indicated then released back to its original pitch

THE FRONT LINE

Want to make it as a professional bassist? Listen up as *BGM*'s world-class bass team reports back from the tourbus

THE JAZZ BASSIST

RUTH GOLLER

Jazz guru Ruth finds creativity in collaboration

I have played a lot of instrumental music over the years, and it's still mainly what I do. It's only been in the last few years that I've really started getting into vocal-led bands, and as a result I've discovered some amazing singers. I've also started writing music with vocals in mind, at one point forming my own band with two singers. I have also started playing a lot of folk music, as well as with some really good singer-songwriters. For example, I play in Sarah Gillespie's band; as a bass player I've really found my feet within her music. I would have never thought that it would suit my playing so well.

I come from an improvised musical background and love to play really full-on electric bass, but I also like playing in a sparse style, sitting within the music and taking a supportive role. In Sarah's band I play double bass; the only things that her music requires are a good feel and steady time, especially between the drums and bass. The fewer notes the better, as long as they sit in the right place.

The drummer in that band is James Maddren, and I have rarely met a drummer with such musicality, language, feel and time. He picks up on dynamics very fast and can play quietly without losing intensity. He can also push the beat without speeding up, which is a skill that not a lot of people have. For a bass player, he is a pleasure to play with. I often become frustrated with drummers who slow down, or who play at the back of the beat. Maybe it has to do with where I feel the beat myself, but I much prefer a pushy drummer to one that sits back. As a bass player, you want to push the music along and play in front of the beat. It's exhausting to have to do this on your own. With a drummer like James, these things fall into place automatically. We know that we can rely on each other's time and groove as much as on our own.

www.ruthgoller.com

THE METALHEAD

DANIEL FIRTH

Cradle Of Filth's bassist Dan loves the drums

As a bassist, more than any other bandmember, your province lies in locking in with the drummer. Together you provide the backbone of a song, so you need to know the style of the drummers you play with. I've played with a fair few over the years, and each has had idiosyncrasies that have affected the way I play with them.

Leonardo Treviño

There are a lot of factors that contribute to a drummer's style. They can be metronomic, but still wild, with crazy fills and unusual accents. They might be quite loose, incorporating a natural ebb and flow, which ideally adds excitement to the song while retaining the groove. Whatever the case, it's good for you to be able to anticipate what's coming next, which is something that will come from playing together regularly and building up a musical rapport. When rehearsing, listen closely to their playing and consider how you can complement their beats and fills with what you're doing. Discuss this with them too; if you hear something that works well, or which you feel you can build upon, let them know. On the other hand, if you have a great rhythm in mind but feel that the drums are diverging too much from it, you should (diplomatically) say so.

Personally, I've always felt that keeping the rhythm of the kick drum in the forefront of my mind gives great results. This might not be the case all the time, for example when the snare is on the beat, but it's a good rule of thumb. In a live setting, when I'm tweaking my monitor mix, I always try to have plenty of kick to work with so I can really anchor to the drummer. In fact, if I had to choose only one thing to have in my monitor, it would be the kick. That includes my own instrument!

www.cradleoffilth.com

THE ALTERNATIVE ROCKER

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

Therapy? bassist Mike says the string's the thing

An infrequently-discussed topic is that of string gauges. It's taken me a few years to find the set of strings that gives me the right amount of tension without compromising playability and tone. Normally, string gauge is determined by the tunings you play in. For example, a four-string in standard E tuning normally works well with .40 up to .105, while anyone who's played in drop D or further down knows that .60 to .120 is a more suitable range. You can, of course, mix them up a bit, as some guitarists do with a 'heavy bottom, skinny top' set, using a lighter gauge for higher strings. This can be handy if you play lead lines up high or a lot of chords.

If you're changing gauge, be aware that heavier strings will have more tension, so they will pull harder on the neck of your bass; make sure it's not bowing or causing damage. Lighter strings have less tension and put less strain on the neck, resulting in a lower action; this can cause rattles and tuning issues when fretting high up.

Intonation and pickup height will also need to be adjusted. Approach any truss-rod adjustments with extreme caution. Many a neck has been irreversibly damaged by overenthusiastic cranking. If you get a professional to do the tweaking, then get them to check the nut too; thicker strings won't sit there as well as light ones, so you can easily damage it. Nuts can be filed out for bigger gauges, but sometimes it's simpler to get a new nut. That way you can get the old one slotted back in if you go back to a lighter string gauge.

It feels good to get the perfect tension on your bass strings, and it's amazing how quickly you can build up your stamina to deal with heavy strings. I find that heavier gauges stay in tune better, ring truer and give a more defined sound. Enjoy finding this out yourself!
www.therapyquestionmark.co.uk

THE TV STAR

DAVE SWIFT

Jools Holland's man Swifty rolls with the punches

I recently finished a two-week residency with British singer-songwriter Rebecca Ferguson, who rose to fame on *The X Factor*. With my TV and live work, I'm usually sent recordings to work from, but with Rebecca I was told that arrangements would be provided. From working with her previously I knew that these would consist of generic lead sheets with chords and cues for piano and guitar – better than nothing, but not bass-specific. The set-list included some familiar covers, and three of Rebecca's originals. None of it was too challenging, but I wanted to scrutinise 'Never Too Much' with Marcus Miller on bass. I transcribed the bass part, then transposed it up a fourth to suit Rebecca's voice.

The night before the first gig, I received a revised setlist. 'Never Too Much' had been scrapped, and two Bob Marley songs added. There was only a short rehearsal the following day, a few hours before the first gig. It was pretty chaotic. As before, I was given basic chord charts with no bass-lines. Throughout the rehearsal, music was being rewritten, chord charts scribbled over, keys changed, photocopies printed off and taped together – all a few minutes before stage time! Thankfully the band's experience and professionalism prevailed, even when Rebecca deviated from the arrangements.

I wasn't happy with playing the Bob Marley songs from just a chord chart, so the next day I spent hours listening to recordings and doing detailed transcriptions of the bass-lines. This was time-consuming, as the parts were more elaborate than I expected. Then Rebecca dropped those songs from the set – at least she reinstated them for later gigs, so my efforts were not entirely in vain.

Things don't always run smoothly in this industry, and it's easy for stress to set in, but even challenging situations like this one provide opportunities for musical growth. See you next month!
www.daveswiftbass.com

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STEVE LAWSON

Beginners' Tutorial

Ready for a muting session with a difference? Beginners' guru Steve Lawson is here

This month we're going to talk about a number of different ways of applying muting to our bass playing. First, though, I want to delve into a possible way of thinking about technique that might help the more cerebrally focused amongst you.

When we're talking about technique, we tend to divide each of the familiar bass techniques up into distinct separate areas, with their own exercises and application. Slap is for one particular kind of line, while picking with our first two fingers is for a particular kind of sound and effect; we're aware of each technique having an application for a particular kind of playing, and we treat them as separate concepts.

However, I once heard Michael Manring talk about technique and introduce the idea that he doesn't see techniques as a series of distinct mechanical functions: instead, he sees technique as a 'way of being' with the instrument. The word he used for how we should see this was 'gestalt', a concept drawn from psychology that can refer to a more holistic approach to a particular area of focus, or a whole that is more significant than the sum of its parts.

It's a concept that inspired me greatly. This column is ostensibly for beginners, but it doesn't equate the need to develop technical and theoretical knowledge with an inability to grasp bigger concepts. As such, the idea of the gestalt may help you to navigate the crossover between different areas of your progress. It is, especially at this level, still important to narrow down the focus of our practice to a specific set of goals so we don't get overwhelmed and can measure our progress more clearly, but it's equally important not to confuse the simplification of a learning journey with a set of false assumptions about the nature of playing music in a wider context.

That's quite long enough for an intro, so with all that said, we're going to look at how the concept of muting impacts what we do as players. 'Muting' just means stopping or interrupting the vibration of the strings. We can use this as the remedy to a problem; if, for example, you find the E or B strings on your bass are vibrating when you're trying to play a line on the A string. We can also use it as a technique to produce a specific sound, for example when we rest the heel of our hand on the strings to dampen overtones and shorten the decay of the note.

Let's start with the remedial work. A lot of players start – and indeed, continue – to

> "IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO CONFUSE THE SIMPLIFICATION OF A LEARNING JOURNEY WITH A SET OF FALSE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF PLAYING MUSIC"

As well as muting the strings, the floating thumb technique keeps our hand in the same position on each string

Rest your hand over the bridge, then 'roll' your hand down onto the string to establish the basic position

play bass with their picking-hand thumb firmly planted on the pickup. This has some advantages, in that it's a fixed reference point, it is solid and can deal with us pressing quite hard against it if we find ourselves wanting to dig in, and it means we're always working with the same four hand shapes – one for each string.

These advantages are, not surprisingly, pretty much the same as the disadvantages; for instance, if your thumb is planted on the pickup, you don't have it available to play a note. Neither is it there for you to use as a mute, nor a guide to where your hand is as you move across the strings. As for that point about the four different hand shapes, when you're picking on the G string, the stretch is quite far and can really limit the range of possible tones you can get from your picking hand. It can also limit the range and subtlety of your horizontal movement along the neck.

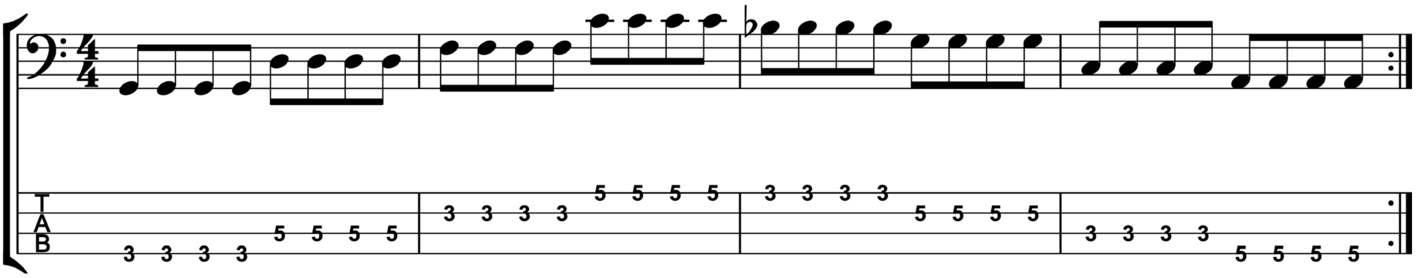
The most common alternative to playing with your thumb planted on the pickup is what's often termed the 'floating thumb' technique, and is more prevalent among bassists who play instruments with five or more strings. That reach to the thinnest string gets pretty ridiculous when you've got six strings between the edge of the pickup and the note you're trying to sound. The basic idea behind the floating thumb is that your thumb is anchored on a string one or two below the string you're picking on.

There are a number of ways of applying this, as shown in the photos at the bottom of the opposite page, and each produces a different set of tonal possibilities. I vary how I apply it, based on two main factors – firstly, whether I want to be picking the strings with my fingertips or my fingernails, and secondly whether I want to be able to use my thumb to actually play those lower notes.

How does this relate to muting? Well, one of the massive advantages of the floating thumb is that it allows you to rest the side of your thumb against all the unplayed strings that are lower than the one you're picking on. So if you're playing on the G string, and your thumb is resting on the D string, it can easily and comfortably mute the A and E strings at the same time. This is particularly useful on big stages with massive amounts of low end, where a rumbling string will cause havoc with the mix and confuse the drummer no end. I remember early on in my gigging career finding that certain lines I'd practised at home had a lot of ringing open strings that I had simply failed to notice at low volume in my bedroom. Once on stage, they were a real problem that I needed to fix fast!

Our first example here is just learning to move across the strings and follow your picking fingers with your thumb on the string below. As you speed up, you may find that your thumb doesn't even properly 'rest' on the string below, but instead just glides across the strings as a guide to where you are, muting the strings as you go. Try the following pattern, paying particular attention to the transitions between the strings.

Example 1



Now try it again – but instead of four notes on each string, try three. This means that with a standard alternating two-finger technique you'll be leading with a different finger each time you cross the strings. This is a really good thing to practise, as the lines you'll end up wanting to play won't always follow one particular pattern.

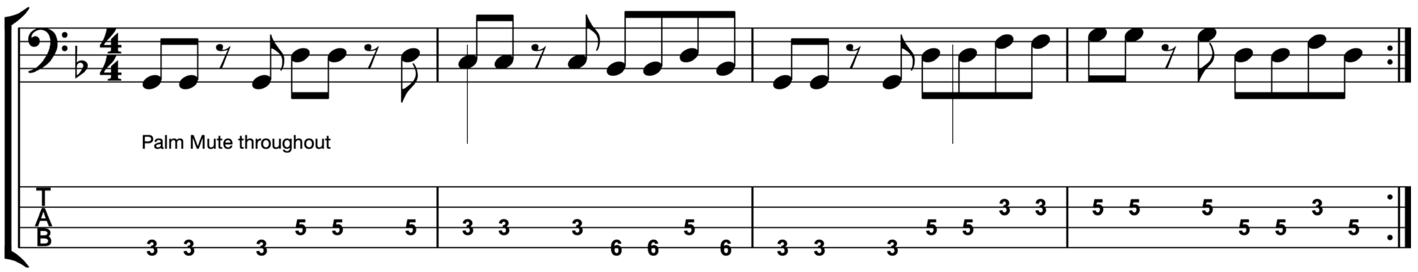
For our second kind of muting, we're not looking at fixing a problem, but instead bringing a whole new tone to our playing. We've touched on this before when talking about picking with your thumb, but let's revisit the basic idea. Start with the side of your hand resting on the bridge, then roll your hand over so your thumb can pick the strings. If you curl your fingers round, you can use your fingers too and get some pretty complex combinations between your fingers and thumb.

What this does to the tone is threefold. Firstly your hand dampens a lot of the overtones, reducing the treble in the sound. Secondly, it changes the attack, rounding out the sound in a manner somewhat similar to an amplified upright bass; and thirdly, it shortens the decay. All of these effects are exaggerated by how far along the string you let your hand rest. Right on top of the bridge gives a really subtle effect, but even a small amount of overlap can really kill the note dead.

Experiment with the point that is most comfortable for you and gets you a sound that you like, and practise taking your hand away, then putting it back and finding the right sound straight away. With any new technique, we want to be able to switch between it and our more developed technical approaches, and eventually find a blend between them (in keeping with our gestalt thinking at the start of this column!) so getting control over the various aspects of it is vital.

Try this line, just using your thumb:

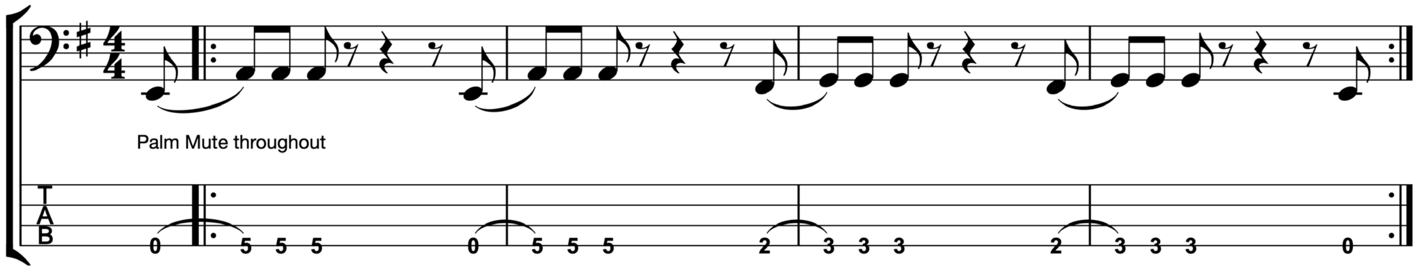
Example 2



There's a lot of string crossing going on here, so take it slowly, and listen carefully to the degree of muting that's happening on each string. Try to get control of it so that each string sounds the way you want it to. Take regular pauses to readjust your picking hand to get the muting where you want it.

Muting can also be really effective on notes that aren't plucked. Let's try a line with some hammer-ons in it and see how that works:

Example 3



This gives us quite a heavy accent on the downbeat; the muted hammer-on has a different tone than the notes we're plucking. This brings us to another point about techniques, which is sorting out which ones are designed for every note to sound identical, and which ones have been developed specifically to give us accents on specific beats or notes.

With palm muting, the fact that our picking hand is anchored to the bass means we sometimes have to be a little more imaginative in how we come up with the line itself. We've got the sound we want, but actually playing beyond a certain tempo can get tricky, so it gives us room to think a little outside the box with our line construction. This is where those hammer-ons can be a godsend.

You may have seen that in the 60s it was very common for bassists to use a foam mute under their strings. On some Fender basses, one was actually built into the bridge cover. This was designed to keep that classic sound on everything; it's a sound synonymous with the great Carol Kaye and the many thousands of sessions she did as the queen of the LA session scene. If you find yourself fortunate enough to own more than one bass, it may be worth setting one of them up so you've got that muted sound on tap if it's a tone that you find yourself reaching for often.

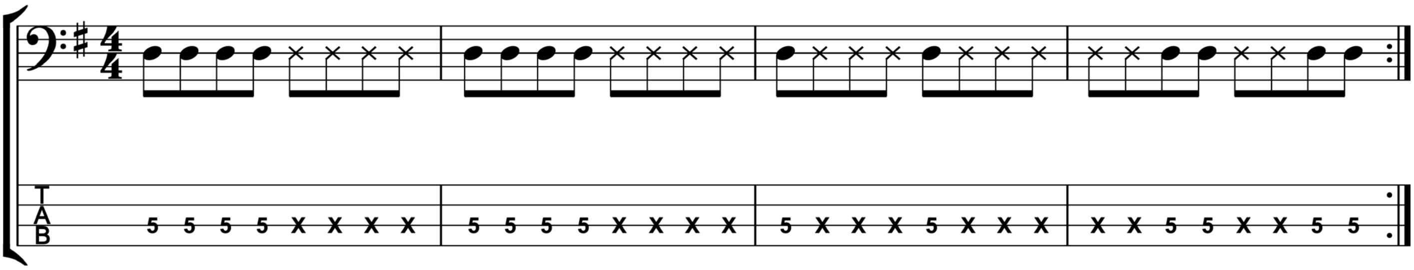
Again, muting isn't just about technique, it's about an approach to sound, and the way that we want the bass to sound in our music. If we want a muted sound across entire tracks, it can be way more advantageous to do the muting mechanically rather than by adjusting our technique, though playing a bass with a foam mute invites us to play in a different way too, thanks to its decreased sustain.

"TO PREVENT HARMONICS, KEEP A FINGER OR TWO ON THE STRING BEHIND THE ONE THAT WAS FRETTING THE NOTE"

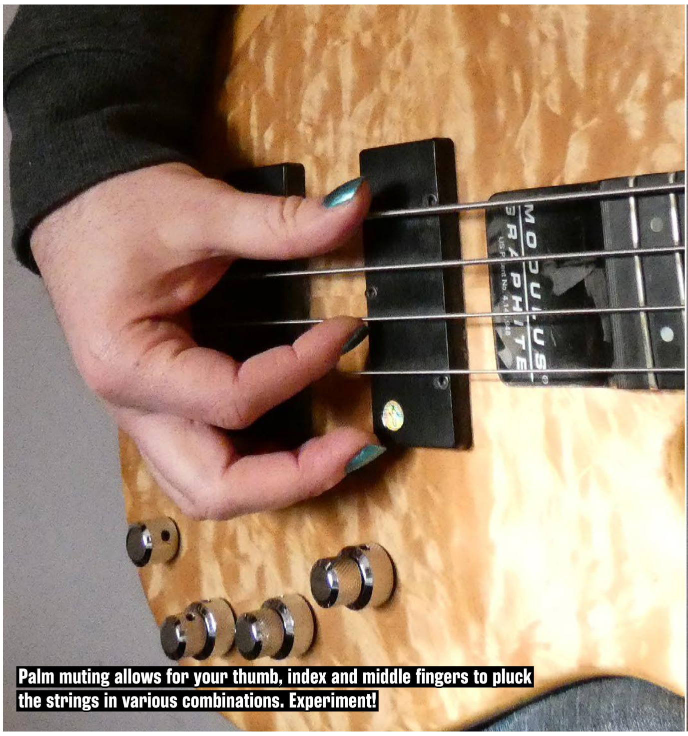
I want to finish this month's column by looking at muting with our fretting hand. This is a style heavily associated with funk and fusion, and can be heard prominently in the chorus of Jaco Pastorius' track 'Come On, Come Over', and many of Mark King's more dexterous slap lines. There are several ways to mute with your fretting hand. The one we're going to focus on involves lifting up the finger that you're currently fretting with, leaving it on the string while you carry on picking.

The thing to be aware of here is that if there's only one finger on your fretting hand touching the string, you may well get a harmonic. This is worth experimenting with, because it could be desirable in some settings, but it's definitely not something you want to happen by accident. To prevent harmonics, keep a finger or two on the string behind the one that was fretting the note. Try this line with your little finger fretting the note, and your other fingers resting on the string behind it:

Example 4



Obviously, the patterns you play there can be varied in a million ways. Draw up your own, and try and come up with combinations that fool you. Start slow and get comfortable on one note before starting to try and move it around. You'll probably find that this is a great way to bring rhythmic variation to a line without having to move off the root. Some songs just don't call for a load of notes, but also sound a little lacking if we're just pedalling eighth notes. Muting can help us break up the rhythm without adding a bunch of extraneous harmonic content. Have fun!


Palm muting allows for your thumb, index and middle fingers to pluck the strings in various combinations. Experiment!

PHIL MANN

Intermediate Tutorial

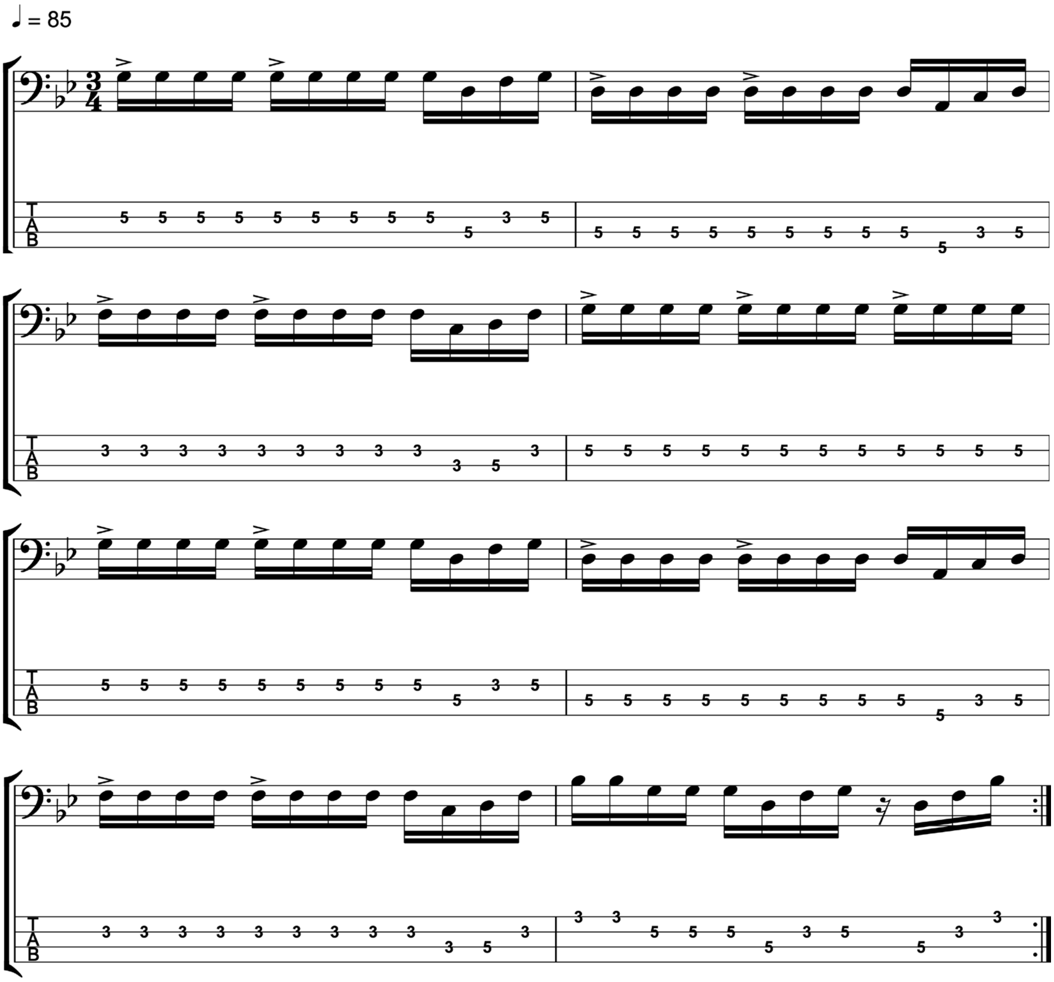
Waltz up doc? Give your lines that sweet swaying style with Phil Mann's timely tutorial on all things 3/4

Welcome! This month's lesson continues our investigation of 3/4 time signatures. Last month we familiarised ourselves with this dance floor titan's fundamental attributes, focusing our attention on the pleasant swaying sensation that seems to be generated by the meter. But what if you're not interested in the hip gyrations of Fred Astaire and would rather spend your time entertaining some cool melodic phrasing in the lower octave? Well, in that case today is your lucky day.

It's important to acknowledge that all time signatures exist purely as a method of structuring the underlying pulse of a composition. Although often shoeboxed into the same concept, 'rhythm' is in fact an entirely different discipline. Acknowledging this difference is a key component to any lesson on time, as diverse rhythms can exist within a variety of different time signatures, whether common time (good old 4/4), or odd time.

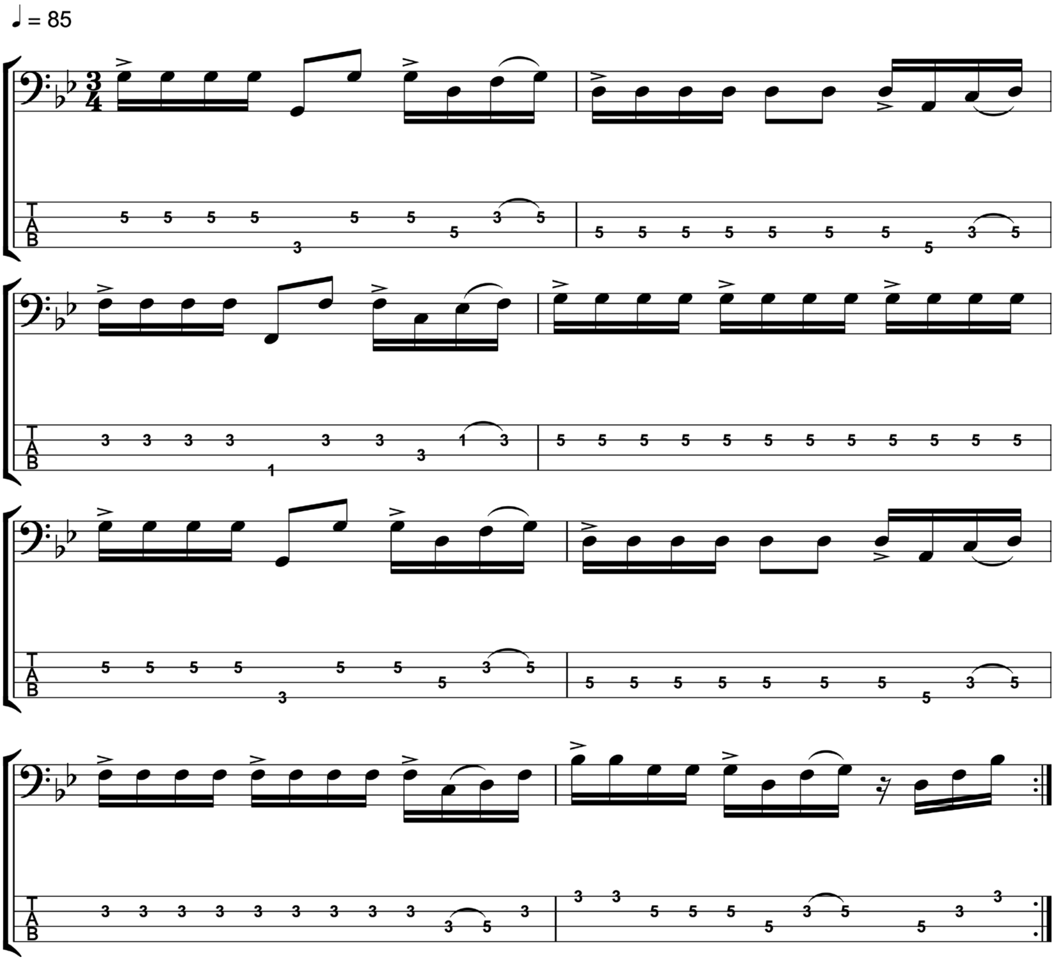
Example 1

If you're a fan of Vulfpeck bassist Joe Dart's thunderous semiquaver phrasing, it's highly likely that you're going to enjoy Example 1. Constructed using an eight-bar circle, and composed exclusively of sixteenth notes, it requires an efficient, metronomic plucking hand technique to cope with the relentless semiquavers. During this early stage of this month's studies, focusing your attention on the proficiency of your plucking hand will pay dividends in the long term. Ensure that you are consistently alternating string strikes between your index and middle fingers.



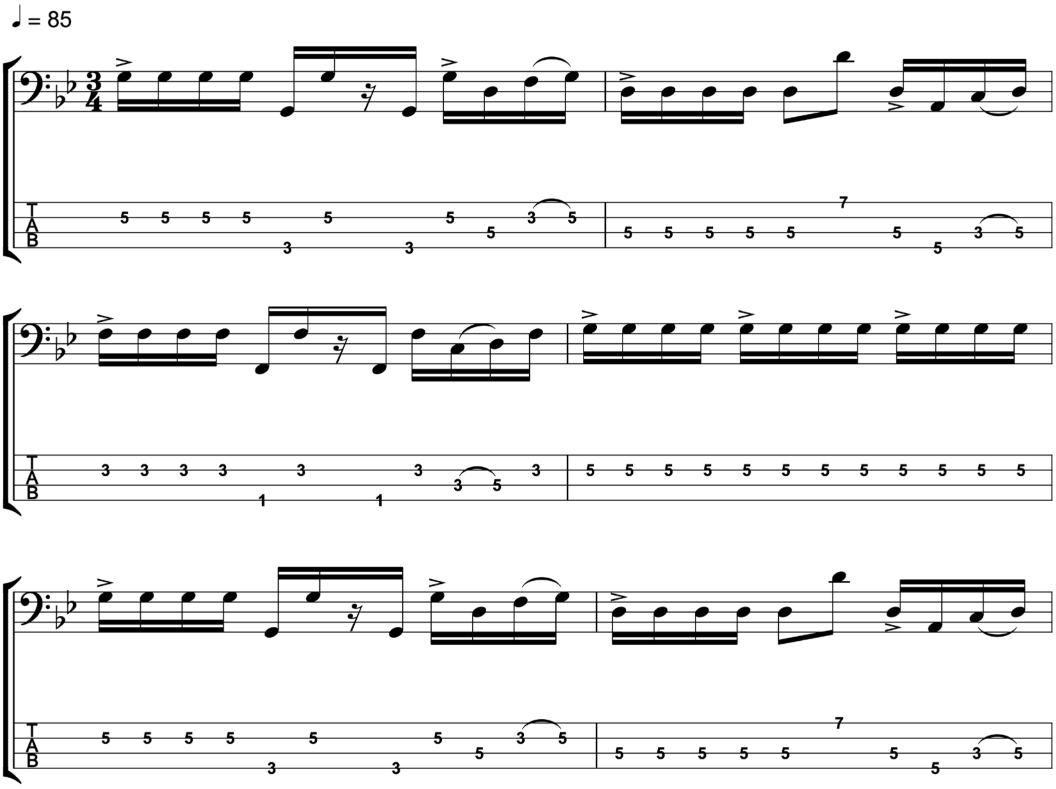
Example 2

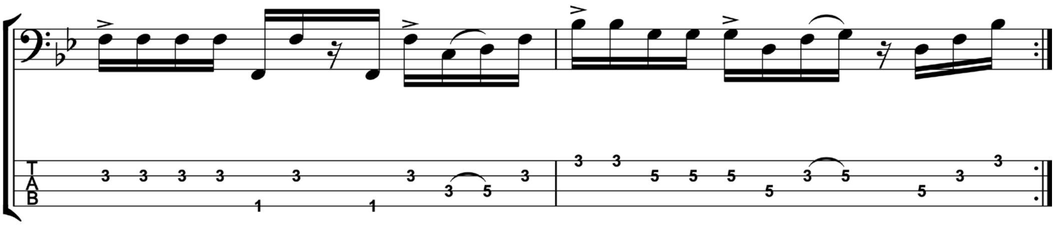
Paying attention to articulation and the developing rhythmic diversity has always been valuable. For example, try attempting Example 1 with, and then without, the accents that appear on the first sixteenth notes of beats one and two. Just this simple amendment in the composition generates an entirely new feel. Now, although Example 2 is similar to our lead study, a number of changes make it more complex. It has accents like those found in Example 1, but also ascending slurs and a collection of impromptu eighth notes. Although the fun factor will naturally gravitate you towards the slurs, it's actually the positioning of the eighth notes that will generate the most conflict in the exercise. You'll also notice that the articulation in the final bar has been refined.



Example 3

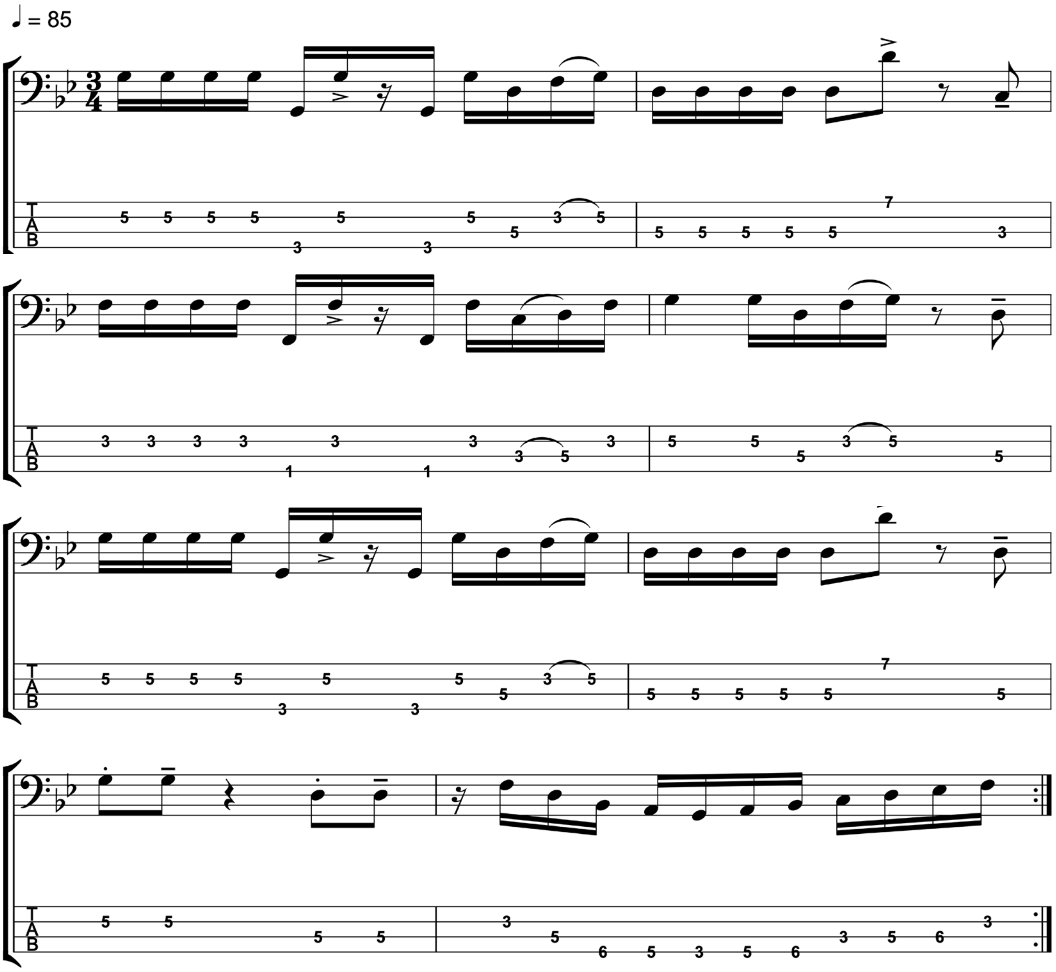
Example 3 includes a sixteenth note pattern found on the second beat of bar one. Focus your attention on different counting methods, and soon you'll recall that sixteenth notes (semiquavers) are commonly verbalised using "1 e & a, 2 e & a, 3 e & a, 4 e & a". Through this system we can interpret the intricacies of the rhythm. In order to execute it accurately, you'll need to play the first, second and last notes of the sixteenth note grouping, while omitting the third. Be vigilant with this rudiment; clarity of perception is your salvation!





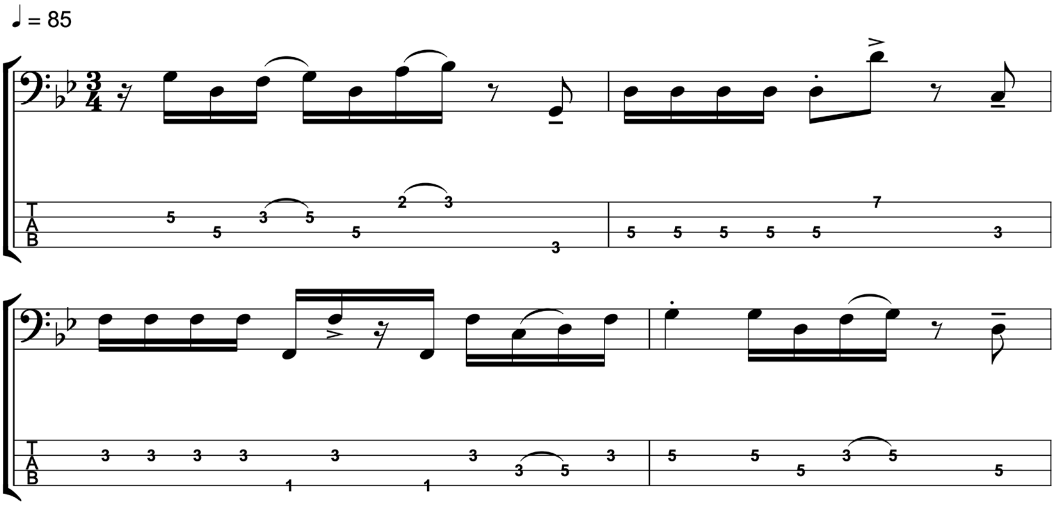
Example 4

Tenuto markings are an ornament reminiscent to that of a minus symbol, often found above or below the note-head. The symbol urges us to play the associated note to its full length, which proves particularly relevant when larger note values are enveloped by sixteenth note subdivisions. In Example 4, you'll encounter tenuto markings during the final beat of numerous bars. Its presence is significant, as the combination of both the associated note, and the preceding rest, creates an air of space in the associated groove. Proficiency is not always about the notes you play; sometimes the finest grooves are created by the space you leave.

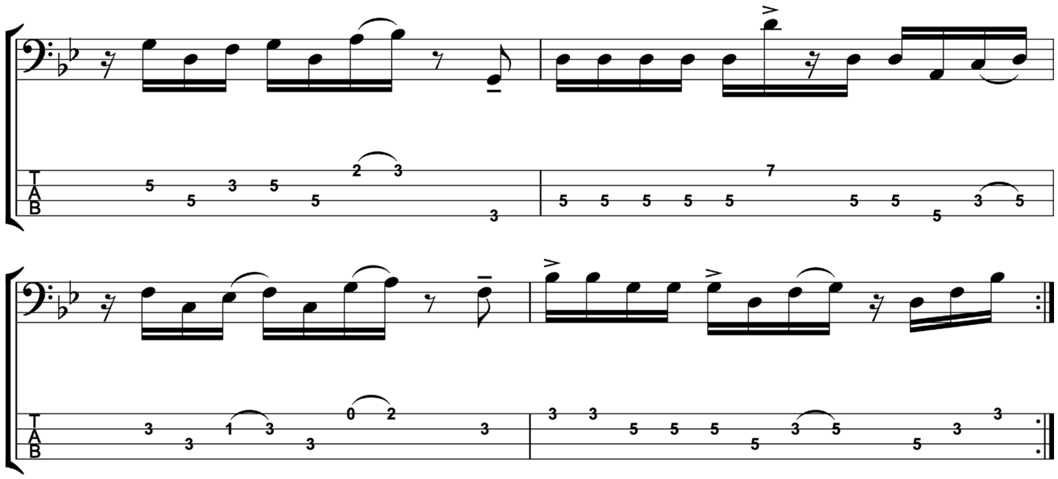


Example 5

Whenever you find yourself performing in odd time, it's only natural to look for some kind of reference point to reassure you where the downbeat is. Like a landmark on a journey, reliable reference points are an essential part of successful progression. In music, one of our most significant waymarks occurs on beat one of the bar. This month's penultimate exercise commences without this, which is quite a significant hurdle in the programme. There are also a number of ornamentations supplementing the notation.

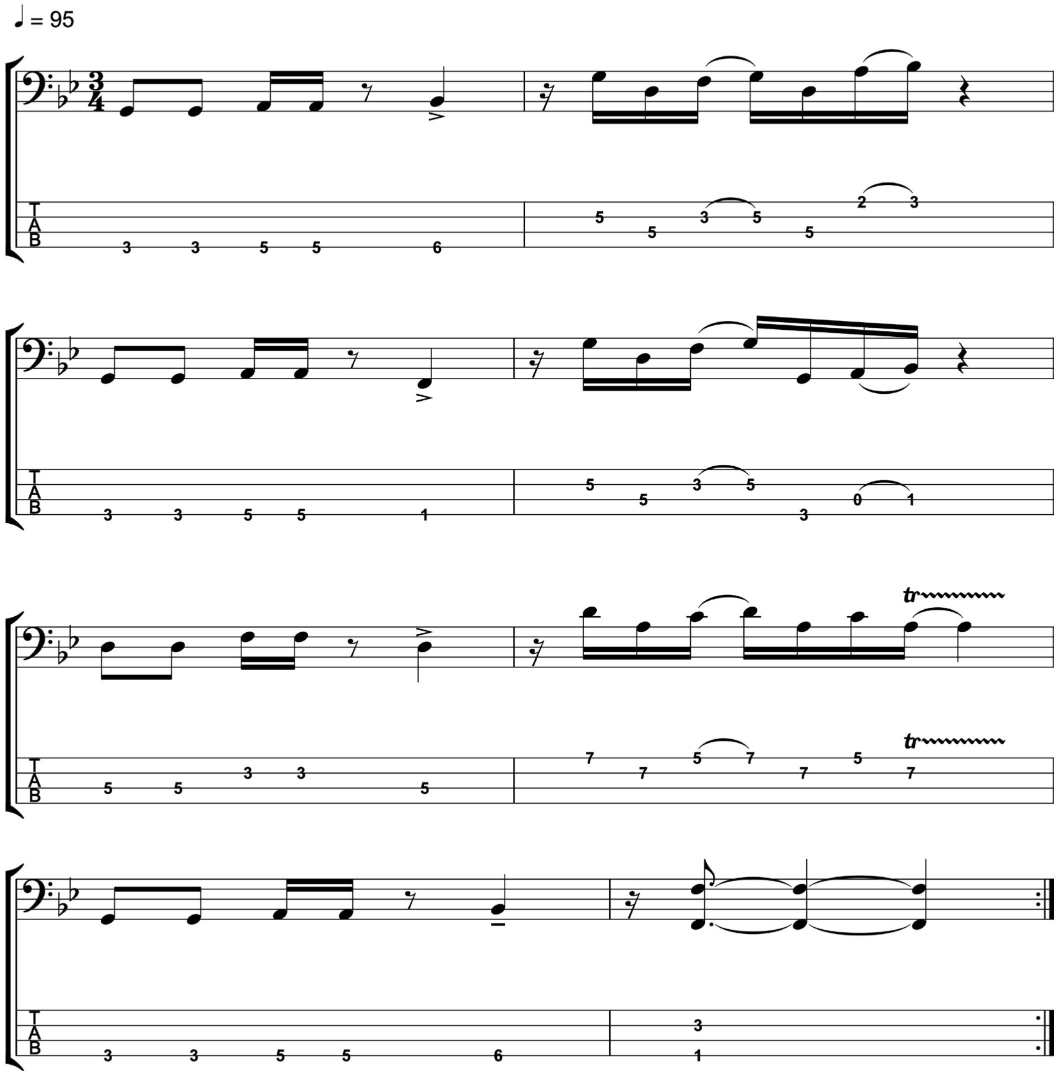


"SKIMMING YOUR EYES VERTICALLY DOWN THE PAGE CAN PROVE INVALUABLE"



Example 6

Our final study is constructed using a two-bar ostinato pattern, with similar rhythmic motifs in the first bar of each pairing. When approaching a piece of notation that's unfamiliar to you, it's habitual to read the staff horizontally, across the page from left to right (after all, that's how notation was originally intended to be perceived). However, quickly skimming your eyes vertically down the page can also prove invaluable, as this lets you identify similarities in the arrangement, before you confront them in your performance. In the case of Example 6, this helps to identify the rhythms common to every other bar, the only differences coming from the slight amendments in pitch. It's surprising just how useful this simple strategy can be! Be mindful of the double stop in the final bar; unless you pluck both notes simultaneously using your thumb and index finger, it will prove challenging to execute. Until next time, practise hard!



MUSIC TRUMP(ET)S WAR

Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.

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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

STUART CLAYTON

Advanced Tutorial

Drill yourself in dexterous triad tapping and unlock the potential of the fingerboard with Stuart Clayton

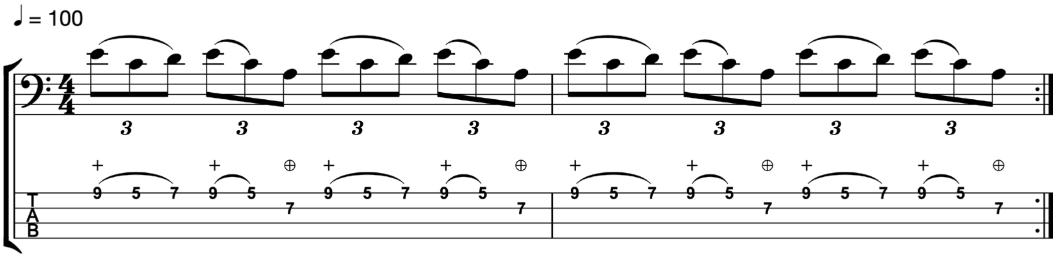
Welcome back to my column on the tapping technique. Over the last few issues we've focused on 'linear tapping', which typically involves long sequences of notes played on a single string, achieved by tapping, pulling-off and hammering-on. This style of tapping was popularised on the guitar by Steve Hackett, Ace Frehley and Eddie Van Halen, before the likes of Billy Sheehan and Stuart Hamm brought it to bass playing.

Last month our lesson was built around tapping phrases across multiple strings using pentatonic box shapes in the key of A minor. In this instalment we're going to be taking the linear tapping technique a step further by looking at some variations that will allow us to outline some simple chord types. Our first example will provide a grounding in the basic concept that we'll be developing later on.

Example 1

This example is similar to one of the basic tapping patterns we covered in the previous instalment. This time, however, the final note in the sequence is on a lower string. This note is played by hammering on with the fretting hand – this has been shown with the fretting hand tap symbol. This line features the notes A, C and E very heavily, and so perfectly outlines the sound of an A minor chord.

This technique can be employed for each of the main triad types: major, minor, diminished and augmented.

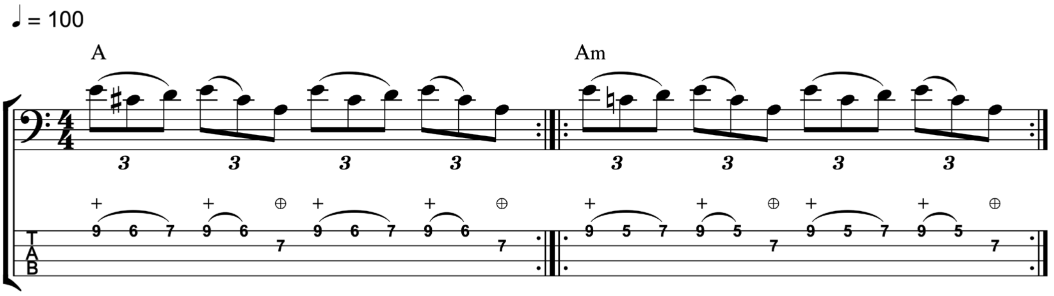


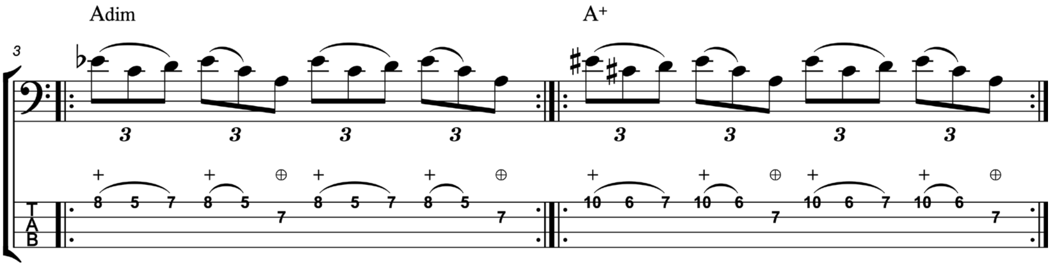
> "THIS TECHNIQUE CAN BE EMPLOYED FOR EACH OF THE MAIN TRIAD TYPES: MAJOR, MINOR, DIMINISHED AND AUGMENTED"

Example 2

Building on the technique from Example 1, here we begin each triad on the fifth of the chord and pull off to the third, alternately finishing by hammering on to a non-chord tone (a D), and hammering on to the root note on the D-string.

Once you can play the four triad types here you'll be ready for Example 3, which covers the diatonic triads in the key of G.

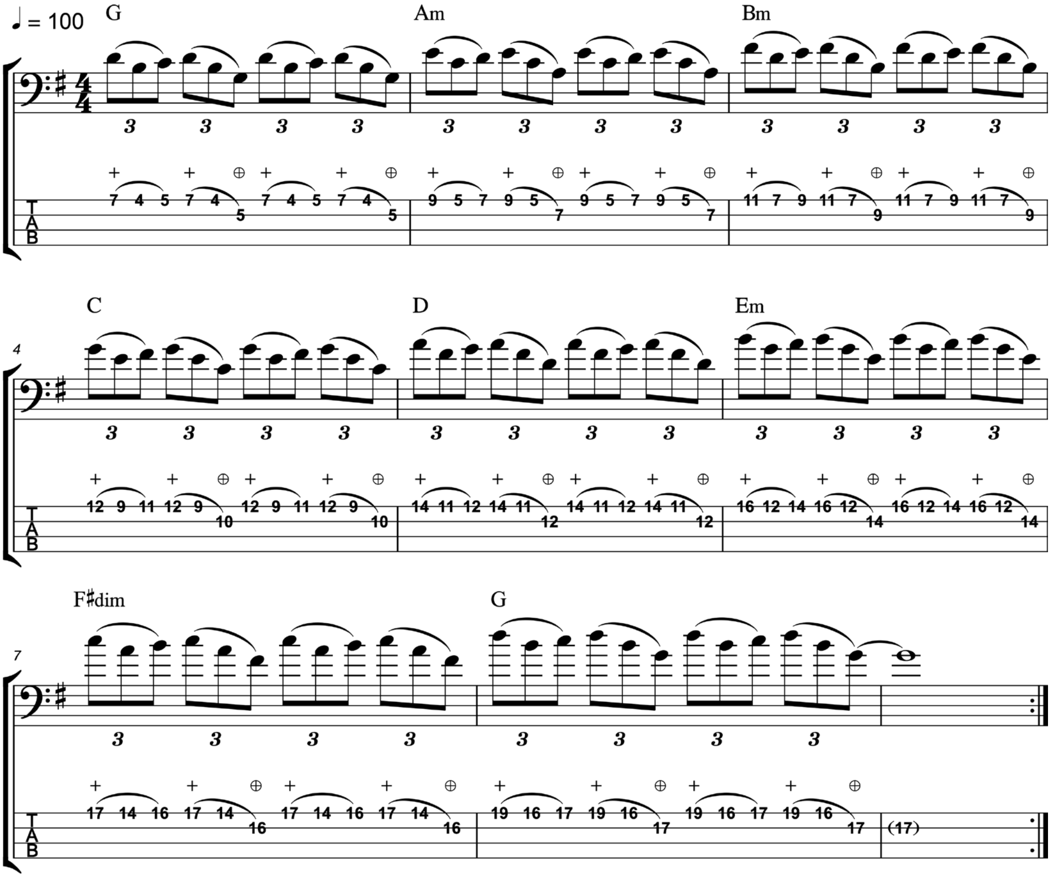




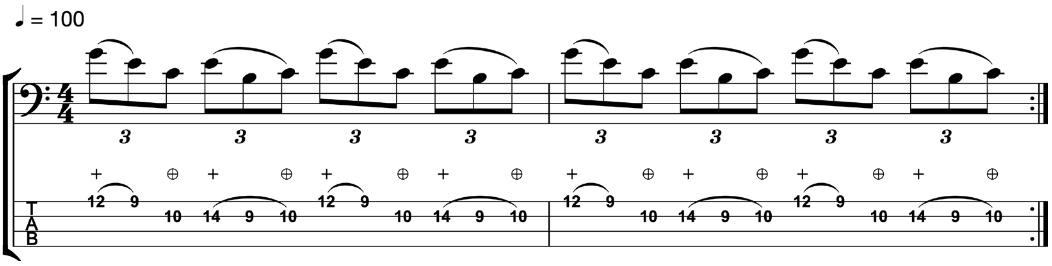
Example 3

In this example we're going to use the technique we've covered so far to work through the sequence of diatonic chords in the key of G major. Note that the augmented chord is not used here, as it is not one of the chords that is derived from harmonising the major scale.

Let's now take a look at a more advanced application of this technique.



Example 4

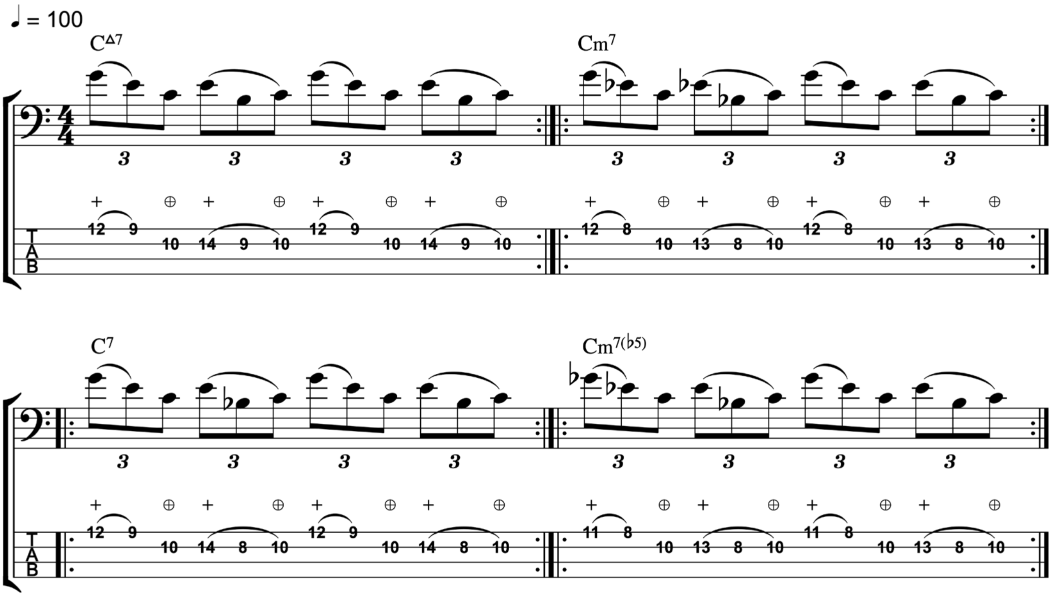


Here the linear tapping technique is used to tap out chord tones from a Cmaj7 chord. To play this you must first barre across the D and G strings at the ninth fret with the first finger of your fretting hand. In doing so, you will be holding down a B and an E, the major seventh and major third of the Cmaj7 chord. The picking hand then taps the G at the twelfth fret of the G string, and pulls off to sound the E. Then the fretting hand hammers on a C at the tenth fret of the D string with the second finger. This is followed by a tapped E at the fourteenth fret, which is pulled off to sound the C (fretted with the second finger), which in turn is pulled off to sound the B, which is already fretted by the first finger.

This idea can be adapted to work for any chord type.

Example 5

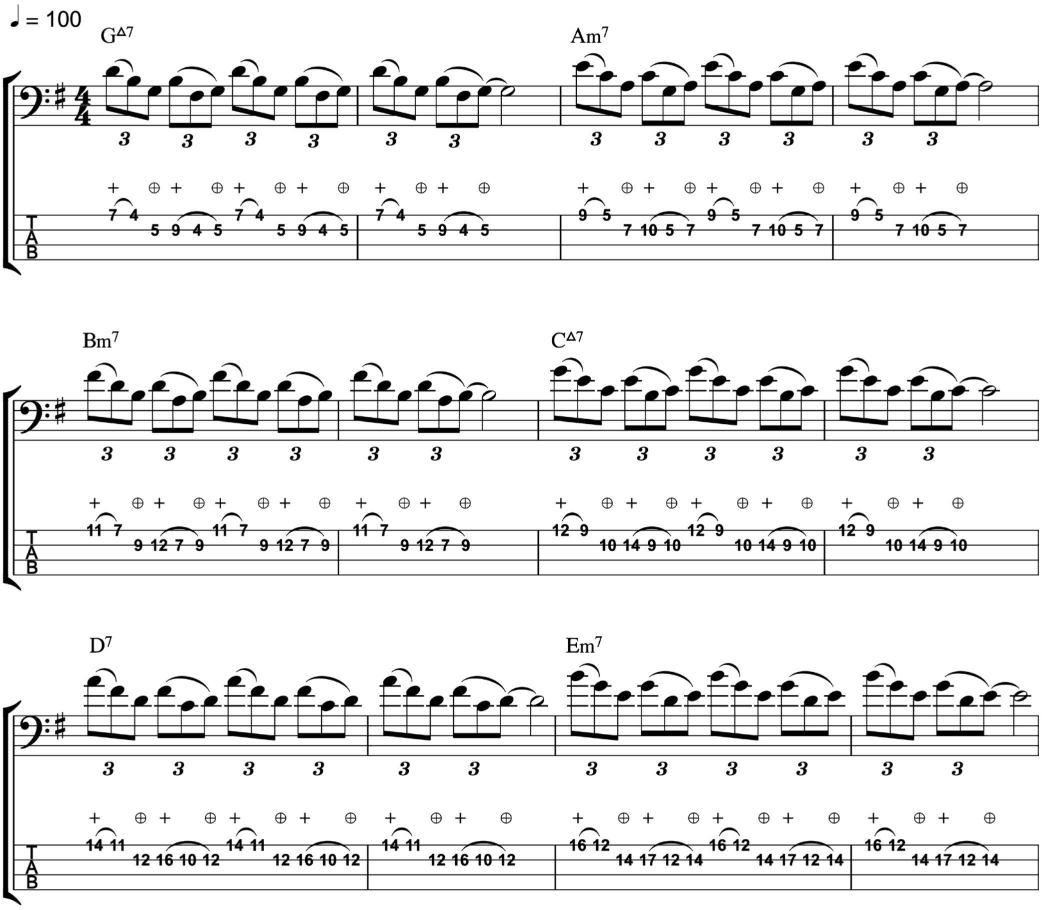
Using the idea above, here we play through all four kinds of seventh chords that occur in the major scale: major seventh, minor seventh, dominant seventh and half diminished. The preceding examples have prepared you for this, but the dominant seventh chord requires more explanation. In the other chord types, it's possible to barre the seventh and third. With dominant seventh chords these are on different frets. To get around this here, you'll need to fret the Bb on the D string with your first finger and the E on the G string with your second. Your third finger will then be used to hammer on to the C.



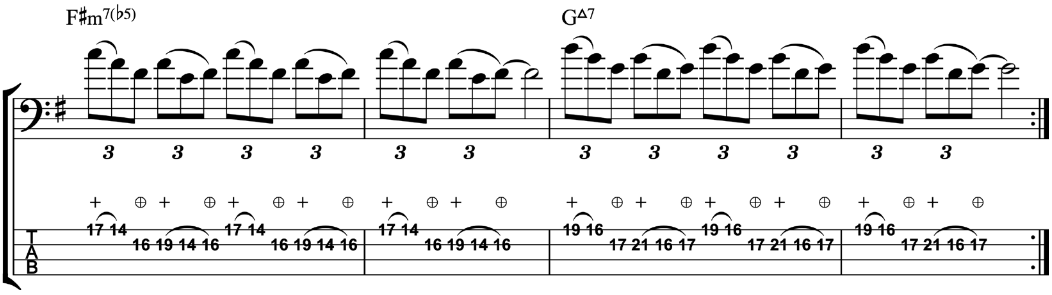
Example 6

In this example we will be working through the seventh chords from the key of G – this key fits nicely onto the fingerboard of a standard bass.

To finish off, I'm going to leave you with a challenging exercise that uses the techniques covered today in the context of a long, tapped fill.



> "THE SLAPPED PARTS OF THIS LINE IMPLY AN A MINOR SOUND BASED ON THE A DORIAN MODE"

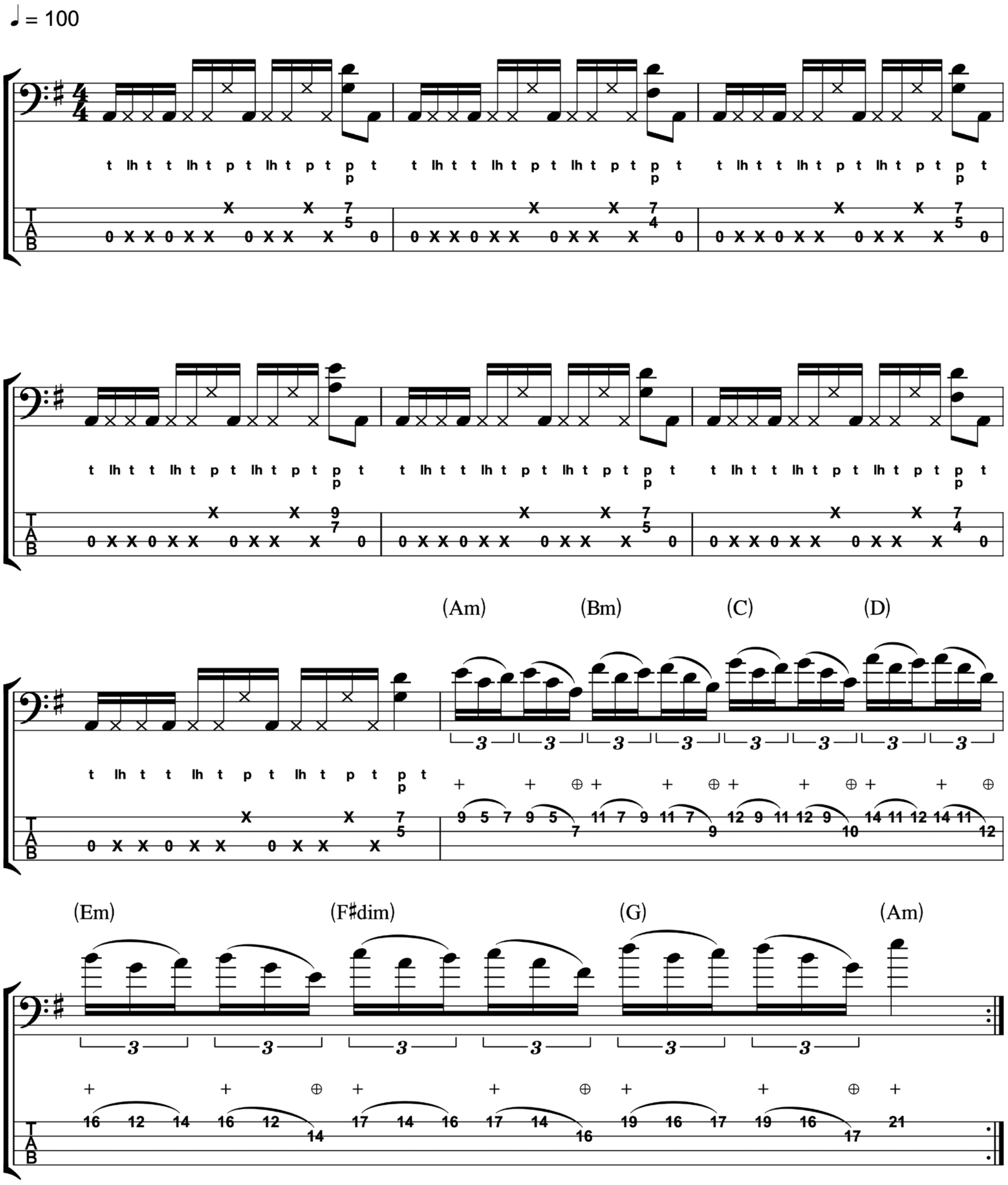


Example 7

The first seven bars of this example are a slap groove that requires the use of fretting hand slaps and popped double stops. Each bar is essentially the same; only the double stops change. Follow the slap guides written between the staves carefully. The fretting hand slaps (indicated with 'lh' in the guides) are performed by slapping the fingers against the strings in order to create a percussive ghost note. These are usually employed as rhythmic devices to fill the gaps in slapped grooves.

The slapped parts of this line imply an A minor sound based on the A Dorian mode (A, B, C, D, E, F#, G, A). Remember that the Dorian mode is essentially the major scale starting and ending on the second scale degree – in this case, it's a G major scale, but starting and ending on A.

When the tapping line begins in bar 8, we'll be outlining all of the triads from the key of G major, but starting from the second, A minor. The line progresses up through the diatonic sequence using the technique that was employed in the previous few exercises.



We've covered some intense material this month, so there's a lot to digest! Remember, it's important to work through these examples in order. They are designed to be cumulative, so don't be tempted to advance until you are comfortable with each one.

In next month's instalment we'll take all of these techniques a step further and examine ways to outline chords across all four strings. If you have any questions in the meantime, I can be contacted via the mag, and I'm always happy to help. Until next month...

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LOW END OF LOVE

Joe Shooman signs off each issue by celebrating an iconic bass guitar. This month, he salutes the mighty Gibson Victory

If you're looking for a heavy bass, the Gibson Victory has to be your first port of call. It weighs 11 pounds, or just under five kilos – oof! Still, the instrument has a cult following to this day. Produced by the Gibson company between 1981 and 1986, the four-string-only bass boasted a mahogany body with a rosewood fretboard on a bolt-on three-ply maple neck and a Thunderbird headstock. Initially, the Fender-esque Victory Standard had a single noise-cancelling Series VIIIB humbucker and passive electronics, giving a Precision-like tone full of mid-range and presence. Indeed, put one of these babies around the neck of a Precision player, and they'll find their hands naturally reaching the same places on the neck.

"It's heavy," concedes Italian bassist Jacopo Belli. "Not as fast or quick as other more modern basses – but the sound, the feeling and the tone is one of a kind. I love the headstock of Thunderbirds but can't say the same for the body, and that's why I love the Victory. It has the best of both worlds." He praises the axe's 'warmth, punchy lows and defined highs,' and praises its 'perfect' blues sound.

Notable Victory players include John Wetton of King Crimson and Roxy Music, Greg Norton of Hüsker Dü, Green Day's Mike Dirnt and Krist Novoselic of Nirvana, a big fan of Gibson's gear. For a man of Novoselic's size, of course, that notorious weight poses very little problem. The Victory Artist is also the instrument played by the bassist in the Pinheads – Marty McFly's band in *Back To The Future* – while Dave Kiswiney of Ted Nugent's band picked up one of the first ones out of the factory.

Bob Burleson, a current player, says that it's "One of Gibson's overlooked models from the early 1980s, and a good bargain today." We found them on sale from £600 up to £1,500, dependent on model. Anecdotally, the instrument lends itself better to pick players, who can achieve a more defined attack.

The 24-fret instrument was designed at Kalamazoo, with demonstration models the first basses to be produced in the new Nashville factory. As well as being a P-Bass rival, they were the first Gibson basses to feature a TRI-4 Wedge bridge.

> "NOT AS FAST OR QUICK AS OTHER MORE MODERN BASSES – BUT THE SOUND, THE FEELING AND THE TONE IS ONE OF A KIND"

The company itself said that their latest bass was pretty much the last word in cool, a 1981 advertisement noting that, "An adjustable neck pitch and new neck shape give you even more fast action and playability. And the feel is so balanced, you'll swear it's a part of you. This Gibson bass is destined to be number one, with sound unequalled on the stage or in the studio. Hold it back for light, smooth jazz or rip it wide open to heavy rock." Was there nothing it couldn't do? If you could pick it up in the first place, that is.

Jacopo Belli

The next iteration of the Victory was the Artist, which also came in an active model and added another, snazzily-oriented pickup. A deep cutaway enabled access to the G-string's high register E, and the scratchplate plus that pickup form two 'fingers'. Chuck Burge designed that feature and, according to the official owners' manual, that diagonal 'buck "yields the widest spectrum of tonal reproduction by capitalizing on the optimum response points of each string".

Jacopo Belli

Tim Shaw was Gibson's electronics designer at the time, and the Artist's three pot, two-switch configuration was also used on the 1982 passive and rare Victory Custom. Fretless versions were also available; Ralphe Armstrong was an early acolyte. Given that it was withdrawn in 1986, it was hardly the P-Bass killer that was perhaps planned. But though it may require a certain level of fitness and endurance to gig with, the Gibson Victory has taken its place as an icon three decades later.

Thanks to Jacopo Belli, Bob Burleston, Anne De Vries, Fritz Fryar and all at the Gibson Facebook pages

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